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Professional Growth Opportunities in a Cooperating Teacher Cohort

by

Stephen Ray Leppard

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Department of Secondary Education

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 2003

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DEDICATION:

Thank you Mom and Dad.

I'm so honoured to be your child .....

and it is with immense pride that I continue to learn from you and your legacy.

ABSTRACT

Over a two-and-a-half year period, seven site-based preservice teacher educators, the author included, met for two dozen 90-minute sessions to explore issues related to supervising both student teachers and the people responsible for mentoring them. Using an action research orientation in the spirit of Kemmis & McTaggart (1997) the cohort raised many questions and proposed numerous ways to encourage meaningful change in existing field experience practices in the local area. The thesis documents how the pre-service field experience offered professional growth opportunities for this cohort of cooperating teachers - how their questions changed over the twenty-four sessions, how the dynamics of the cohort shifted and how ideas were generated, tried and shared. It traces the cohort's evolution from seeing teacher education in a traditional social science model to an awareness of the role that personal professional knowledge plays in practice and identifies ways to heal the theory-practice/university-school divide.

The concluding chapter offers recommendations for stake holder groups involved in pre-service teacher education, reflections about doing action research and suggestions about factors and procedures to consider when establishing an action research cohort.

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To my breathtaking children Rebecca and Malcolm -- my wish for you is to seek your bliss as you live with purpose.

And ultimately, to my gracious and beautiful wife Elizabeth.
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PRELUDE:

THE ORIGINS OF A CAREGIVER

Somehow I knew I would find vocation with people. From a young age I saw that people skills were encouraged and rewarded in my family. These came naturally, for my parents' home environment encouraged expression of thought, feeling and caring for oneself as well as others. To be a "good person" was to be in connection with both your inner spirituality and people who lived within the community. To listen to one's intuitive voice as well as to demonstrate attentive listening with others was considered admirable. To live with purpose was to treat others with the dignity they deserve, facilitate meaningful change when needed and live, laugh and love each day. In helping another improve her or his situation, one's own life was enhanced.

Being nice while assisting others was purposely modeled and demonstrated. Like a mountain stream tumbling and swirling over piercing rocks, my parents exemplified fluidity within difficult situations. Often making pastoral calls together, they provided comfort and fellowship to those in the midst of a difficult change, such as a sudden loss or suffering with protracted family illness. Later I understood that the flowing care, observed as a child, required arduous, gut wrenching emotional toil -- work that is infinitely more difficult and draining than the most formidable labour I would later experience as a young man.

My earliest memories of my parents' ministry are filled with the excitement and pride I felt as I accompanied my father to the construction site each day to survey the most recent ground work for the structural developments of the church. While Dad conferred about excavation plans with the site foreman, I observed him laying the footings for a church community in the eastern edge of a booming prairie city. With the hindsight afforded in adulthood I also appreciate that he was creating the foundations for a cohort of parishioner leaders within the emergent congregation. These foundations included using our home, the manse, as meeting hall and Bible class location for the congregation.

Once put to bed, I would creep stealthily down the hallway towards the living room and kitchen to observe the power of like minded people who, through their combined efforts, were building a cohort with the purpose of sharing in the process of creation. The living room served as the focal point of the worship committee, while the kitchen table was cleared to act as a drafting table, where last minute additions and modifications to the chapel were penciled onto the latest ammonia-scented blueprints.

During these evenings I hoped to be detected, for I could then be asked to either help make the fruit punch in the kitchen or, better still, distribute appetizers and be in the midst of the collective. With Dad facilitating and Mom hosting I imbibed the gift that was their perfectly synchronized marriage and ministry. The gifts of consciously committed fellowship, careful listening and unconditional support for those committed to the cause -- were omnipresent and observed.

Later, with the emergent chapel taking form directly beside our home, and the neighbourhood school, which had served as our temporary sanctuary on Sundays directly across the street, as the third of four children of a newly appointed minister, I could be excused for thinking my universe consisted of the well-worn triangulated pathways which stretched between the worlds of home, church and school. Once completed, the church was home for Cubs, youth groups, Sunday School, and the precursor to kindergarten. The foundations of my personal and professional identity were formed, back-filled and built upon within the sturdy cinder block walls of our church, my neighbourhood community and within my parents' ministry.

As with any dwelling place, while the outside presented itself as complete, a tremendous amount of toil, sweat and stamina was required to create a fulfilled interior. Leadership, which at times required either gentle coaxing and asking good questions or at other times delegating and/or coercing, needed to be done. Considerable collaborative sensitivity was required when convincing parishioners that they possessed both the potential for changing their current situation and the capabilities required to provide initiative on various committees necessary for the establishment of a new church community. When

they could not get others to do the work, I observed, on more than one occasion, my parents roll up their sleeves to get the job done. Their willingness to get dirty and do "whatever-it-takes" to attain the community's desired goal garnered *my* admiration.

I witnessed my father transform himself from a paint speckled handyman, who, along with a group of dedicated parishioners, worked late into a Saturday evening, into the pristine, yet still paint splattered Preacher who took to the pulpit on Sunday morning. I also observed my mother emerge from the the baby fold. From an exclusive knee level perspective I saw two people purposely involved and passionately fulfilling *their calling*.

My roots run deep with the sounds, senses and textures of a childhood filled with observations of my parents' purposeful and collaborative efforts amidst their calling. And like them, I have followed my calling -- teaching and teacher education. While my calling of working with the field experience portion of preservice teacher education may be different than that of my parents' religious discipline, the theme of establishing a place where sincere and authentic kitchen table dialogues may take place -- among a cohort engaged in social change -- is consistent.

In this research project both an autobiographical voice as well as an action research orientation are the method of inquiry. I have been able to personalize the writing and engage in a reflective experience while creating knowledge. I have also had an opportunity to acknowledge my bias towards establishing collaborative and committed communities which come together to provoke meaningful change.

CHAPTER 1:

SEARCHING FOR THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Sitting in the congenial, couch-style chairs within the Department of Secondary Education's conference room, I desperately searched for the precise words to convey the vision for my research proposal to the assembled candidacy committee. During the oral exam, which resembled the living room discussions from my childhood, each committee member asked questions which served as discussion starters for the next few minutes of communal dialogue. One member required me to articulate how I felt about my own field experiences. While the exact phrasing of the probe is now lost, the meaning still lingers. The query asked me to ask myself, 'What was my motivation for pursuing the topic of pre-service teacher education?'

While much of my previous course work had been of an epistemological nature -- exploring why I was committed to pre-service teaching -- it was during candidacy that I became completely cognizant of how profoundly important preservice teacher education was to me, not only professionally, but also *personally*[1]. Struggling to verbalize my thoughts, I realized that *my calling* included classroom teaching as well as preparing others for the teaching profession. As I discussed the significance of researching and questioning existing preservice teacher education practices, I recall my committee nodding in unison. My research focus was emerging and throughout the next four years the focus would continue to be refined. While my topic was clear, my research question was not. The search for the question led me in two parallel directions. I needed to learn more about teacher education in Alberta and I needed to find a research methodology that would match my interest in both process and product and allow me to explore. As luck would have it, the discovery of a research methodology -- action research -- came first.

In this work you are going to read the narrative that was originally intended to improve student teacher learning during field experiences. As such it was drafted in a descriptive

---

[1] While I appreciate that the use of italicized text may not adhere to the strict APA standards, I reserve the right to employ this literary technique to emphasize a personal point of importance.

genre to show what excellent practices could look like. Later it was retooled to include descriptors as to what successful relations with student teachers could feel like. As I culminated this research project I began to appreciate that the progression in my own thinking/writing matched the progression in my practice. Because of this newly found awareness I gained while experiencing an educational journey with a cohort of site-based teacher educators, I have been able to define, and further refine, my own living theory of education. Living theory, according to McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead (1999) can be defined as a "validated account of improved education through action research" (p. 128).

My reconstituted living educational theory is grounded in an assumption that while engaged in action research it is permissible -- almost expected -- to allow research questions to evolve as circumstances associated with each action research inquiry orientation dictated. McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead (1999) have suggested that while engaged in action research, there needs to be an understanding that each cycle contains the germinating questions for the next cycle (p. 107).

These questions also changed as I formed relationships with each cohort member and listened to their emergent needs, which included addressing a perceived lack of information. These concerns were addressed with personal anecdotes regarding their involvement with student teachers. These stories of frustration and confusion grounded the cohort in a sense of commonality as well as providing a base for the second development, exploring current literature. Current readings not only strengthened each individual's understanding of the issues; it also validated the cohorts' contributions as they generated print material in the later stages of the research.

It was not until after writing this document that I became aware that the evolution in my questions paralleled the evolution in my thinking about issues related to working with student teachers and their mentors. While continually recalibrating the research question I also realized that the progression in my own thinking matched the progression in the passage of the cohort as they moved -- with me -- through the action research cycles. While searching for the questions which needed to be asked, I became more disciplined, determined and rigorous. Throughout this process I came to appreciate that the

questioning process was an integral part of the methodology.

As the action research process evolved the final question(s) became as much about professional growth opportunities for cooperating teachers as about student teacher development. So the research question that evolved is "How did the pre-service field experience offer professional growth opportunities for a cohort of cooperating teachers?"

CHAPTER 2:

TEACHER EDUCATION PRAXIS

Many powerful emotions were generated over the last four years as I lived within this action research project. Additional emotions were revisited with each retelling of my final field experience. While I acknowledged long ago that these emotional connections laid the ground work for my purposeful involvement with preservice teacher education, it was only when I started to understand the ethics and edicts of action research as a cyclical orientation for deeper practitioner research that I appreciated that during my final field experience I had witnessed, and learned from, no *with*, a cooperating teacher whose practice was informed by critical reflection (Beauchamp, 1998; Carson, 1997). This teacher exercised praxis, the craft of blending theory and practice into each other to create knowledgeable, purposeful action (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999). Working with, and learning from, this person, I first became aware of an educator who was comfortable living within a professional practice that actively encouraged the recurrent revisitation of teachable moments in order to reflect upon their educational merit. I would later come to know these as key characteristics associated with Kemmis & McTaggart's (1997) four cycle action research model[1]. To this end I saw her as she actively co-planned and then initiated lessons in consultation with her peers. I then observed her as she regularly both set aside time to *observe* students engaged in learning and then critically *reflect* on the students' actions and accomplishments -- all in the hopes of increasing a deeper understanding which would eventually lead to generating further knowledge. For the past 15 years I have chosen to live my classroom practice following similar qualities. Therefore, when the time came to initiate a doctoral program I decided to adopt action research as an orientation for my research as well. As such within this chapter the following questions will be discussed, 'What is Action Research?', 'Why was it chosen as a research orientation for this study?' and 'What form of Action Research was eventually chosen?'

---

[1] A number of action research models or modes of inquiry will be explored and discussed later in this chapter.

The first section of this chapter, entitled "Preparing the Ground Work for Action Research", details the process research participants need to travel through in order to gain understanding. Within a sub-section entitled "Forming a Cohort of Collaborators and Co-Researchers" the integrity, bias and forestructures (Ellis, 1998) as well as the *identity* of six cohort members of the 14 participants will be explored. These six cohort members will be personally introduced[2] for we felt it was critical for the success of the action research to recognize these participants as co-researchers (Brennan & Noffke, 1997). This personalization of the six action research cohort members finds favour in such researchers as Palmer (1998) who has stated, "*good teaching* [and in this case mentoring preservice teachers and researching educational issues] *cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher*" (p. 10).

The second and third sections of this chapter, entitled "Defining Action Research" and "Choosing an Action Research Model," describe the quest for more knowledge in terms of this investigative orientation. I stressed the term orientation instead of method because "[m]ethods are techniques which take on a specific meaning according to the methodology in which they are used. We need to resist treating research as mere techniques" (Silverman, 2000, p. 89). In contrast, a research orientation can be thought of as a way in which "researchers [can] focus on a [social] topic with a given group" (Janesick, 1998, p. 39) using a variety of approaches, all of which honours the question posed by Whitehead (1989), "How can I improve ...?" (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999, p. 14).

Preparing the Ground Work for Action Research

Due in large part to the encouraging response I received from student teachers, teaching staff and university personnel for the perpetually evolving field experience program at the host schools in which I worked, in the fall of 1999 I catapulted myself from the host school environment into the doctoral program with a preordained mandate. While many of my graduate student peers struggled to find not only their research question but also a

[2] It is important to note that in addition to signing an 'Action Research Release form' (Appendix A) each of the six fellow co-researchers had numerous opportunities to read the draft of this document and provide editorial input (see Appendix B entitled Actual Name in Print).

research area to explore, I entered the doctoral program with a blueprint for conducting research -- I was going to study how the Faculty of Education (University of Alberta[3]) could do field experiences better. At the time all that I thought that I needed was a research methodology that would expedite data gathering and a question which stressed classroom teachers would see as worthy of their time!

In 1999 my vision of a thesis was a document which addressed all the problematic areas I discovered while acting as a site-based preservice teacher educator. This was the type of project I had undertaken while completing a previous graduate degree. I was proud to have conducted research that would lead to the generation of a "how to" (Britzman, 1991; Chalmers, 1968; Goodman, 1986) document that would be user friendly and easily applicable to other sites. While completing that Master of Education project, I adopted a pattern of investigation typical of beginning researchers who "summarize rather than conceptualize data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1991, p. 64). This summarizing approach was in part the result of working both as a classroom teacher and a graduate researcher. During that time period I was heavily involved in giving inservices to fellow teachers on topics ranging from classroom management techniques to early childhood written language acquisition[4]. During each afterschool session, which started at 4:00 p.m. and ended at approximately 5:00 p.m., I was required to summarize information succinctly, allowing classroom teachers to take that information back to their classrooms and apply the selected material immediately. Within this model, information was seen as a commodity and I, therefore, was the broker (Stringer, 1996).

I now appreciate that although I have constructed more self knowledge, I still do not have all the answers -- the answers instead lie in the hearts and minds of the collective consciousness within both my preservice teacher educator peers and the cohort of fellow co-researchers (who helped generate the knowledge within this study). According to action researchers such as McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead (1999), "(a) central value that is

[3] Throughout the remainder of this document the title University of Alberta will be presented in the shortened version (U of A).

[4] Please see Bainbridge-Edwards, J. & Malicky, G. (1996) *Constructing Meaning*, Ontario: Nelson (p. 409) for a brief explanation and example of the 'Writing Continuum' (1991).

accepted by most action researchers is the value of respect for others which means that their views and values must be accommodated" (p. 16). Thus, it is my obligation as an action researcher to create spaces where educators can come together to discuss and resolve concerns. Tripp (1990) draws attention to the need for professionals to plan and act in areas that will encourage growth, "[a]ction research enables teachers both to formulate and act upon their own concerns, thereby personally and professionally developing themselves within and through their practice" (p. 165).

As the following four subsections -- plotting an action research strategy, narrowing the research focus, valuing genuine dialogue, and forming a cohort of collaborators and co-researchers -- will affirm, I eventually grew to understand that when teachers gather regularly to systematically discuss their teaching they experience significant and profound personal and professional growth. In turn, this growth can also initiate positive changes within the area of field experiences for student teachers and cooperating teachers.

Plotting an Action Research Strategy

Convinced I possessed the answers, and with the assuredness of an iconoclast, I embarked on this doctoral study in the spring of 1998 with rolled up sleeves and a mission to solve the problems I perceived in the undergraduate teacher education program within the Faculty of Education (U of A). This intense commitment to facilitate the "lateral shift to the practical" (Carson, 1999b [quoting Aoki, T., 1979]) was problematic, for it did not allow unbiased entry into the doctoral program. Instead of being empowering, these strongly held beliefs or forestructures (Ellis, 1998) temporarily impaired my vision and impeded my initial attempts at research. I did not truly appreciate that "authentic research is where you do not already have the answers" (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999, p. 13). I *had* the answers, and I was going to share them with the academic community in order to initiate change and "ReDesign Teacher Education"[5] (Tom, 1997). I initially drew together a collective of cooperating teachers to afterschool information sessions with the promise of addressing issues of concern with

[5] Capitals are used in this instance to emphasize the title of a book.

regards to field experiences within host schools. The clearly stated and pragmatic goal of the group was to create a best practices list that could be taken back to host schools for immediate implementation with student teachers. This idea bank could then be distributed to additional host schools to impact the quality of student teaching experiences on a larger scale.

I now acknowledge that moving into action research with preconceived notions was erroneous. The most poignant lesson I needed to learn involved asking myself the question, 'When does being pragmatic become dogmatic for a researcher?'

As Tom (1984) warns, "dogmatism also involve[s] excessive commitment to certain ideas. The line between warranted and excessive commitment is hard to see, especially in regards to one's own convictions" (p. 9). While continually vacillating between warranted and excessive commitment while planning for educationally sound field experiences for teacher candidates in host schools, I'm now, more than ever, confident that preservice teacher education is my calling. This calling requires a tremendous amount of my professional energy and creativity. I am also convinced that action research is the orientation by which this calling can be exercised. These feelings are now tempered with much more reserve. Action researchers such as McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1999) acknowledge these personal connections with the subject matter and advise novice action researchers not only to admit but also to appreciate that "action researchers tend to be working intentionally towards the implementation of ideas that come from deep-seated values that motivated them to intervene" (p. 10). Rorty (1982) suggested that, as human beings, we have only two projects which we can take responsibility for: our own continual growth and helping to solve the problems in our community. These values are consistent with my lived practice. This congruence between my life lived and my life acted upon in meaningful engagements with others is reflected in my desire to create meaningful change and to make an impact. To accomplish these improvements it is also necessary that I acknowledge that action research projects need to be much more studious and far more detailed than a list of "how to's" in an instruction manual. I now understand that "(i)nstead of a fixed blue print, the diagram for change is continually being erased and

redrawn" (Tom, 1997, p. 191), for learnable moments within a conversation[6] must be honoured with space and time. As I proceeded through the research, I understand more clearly that in order to create these places and spaces, I need to travel in a more methodical, rigorous direction in order to create knowledge which may then effect positive change. Instinct is not enough: it needs to be supported and verified by rigourous research into the subject area.

During planning stages, I continually revisited my initiation point, often checking notes made months beforehand or reviewing literature read previously to confirm my discoveries (Strauss & Corbin, 1991). In this way I often noted how, within action research cohort discussions, members would return to previously discussed topics, expressing slightly differing opinions with each successive revisit[7]. During each planning stage, group members shared ideas for future interactions with student teachers and teaching staff. With each idea or concern voiced during the planning stage, I visualized members moving with me along a path.

Narrowing the Research Focus

Along with the rigour and strategic action associated with educational action research, in hindsight I now also appreciate that preservice teacher education is an expansive field of study. I needed to narrow my research focus. I recalibrated my mandate and chose to concentrate on the undergraduate field experience program currently employed within the Faculty of Education (U of A). However, I again discovered that it, too, was rather large to embrace. I chose to tighten the search to the component of the field experience enterprise[8] entitled the Collaborative Schools Initiative (CSI) and specifically the elements involved in establishing and then implementing, Whole School Experiences. My initial research question, the one taken before and approved by my candidacy committee,

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[6] These are much like teachable moments within a classroom setting.

[7] A detailed retelling of participant observations will be undertaken in Chapter Five.

[8] Please read Chapter Three for a more detailed explanation of the term "field experience" rather than "practicum".

became, 'How does collaboration between host schools impact the quality of whole school experiences?'

The concentration on this particular study area was done for three reasons. First, defining the research topic occurred after I, as a privileged School Coordinator who attended yearly campus meetings and received print material, learned that the Faculty of Education (U of A) was introducing the CSI. Buried deep within this field experience model was a departure from the dated paradigm of teacher training[9] to that of educating the person who happens to teach (Carson, 1998a), or as Hargeaves (1993)[10] has suggested "understanding the teacher means understanding the person the teacher is" (Huberman, 1993, p. viii). I experienced and sincerely believed in the value of the,

> paradigm shift in the field experience program away from the apprenticeship model towards one that would offer more opportunities for exposure to the whole-school setting. Such opportunities would include exposure to different teachers and teaching styles, visitations outside of the immediate grade or subject area of the student teacher, and coordinated activities that would provide insight to the various ancillary activities that surround the operation of a school. (Yurick, 2000a, p. 3)

The second reason grew out of the six years I had spent immersed in the sometimes frustrating quest for more information about the CSI program. I felt that I could not only empathize with the tensions many other school coordinators might be experiencing but also explain the revised protocols and the underlying pedagogical considerations of the new field experience programs to them. An example of such a question is reflected in the

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[9] The move away from apprenticeship-like "training" models for preservice teacher preparation towards a program that included reflective practices and an emphasis on scholarly pursuits finds favour with such researchers as Ted Aoki. Using Aoki's models as references, we can see a movement away from the deskilling of teachers to nothing more than cogs in an educational machine, to the emphasizing of the humanness of the profession. A pivotal component of this humanness would be the need for meaningful dialogue or some form of communication to occur. This would signify the movement away from the Empirical-Analytic mode (Aoki, 1984) of curriculum to the emphasis on communication and reflection, which is the Critical Orientation mode (Aoki, 1984). A more detailed discussion and exploration of preservice teacher education programming and vision will occur within Chapter Two.

[10] Andy Hargeaves is responsible for writing the forward to Michael Huberman's book *The lives of teachers*.

following remark from a participant[11], "I, too, am looking for some specific ways to make the collaborative approach more workable in the school setting" (S. S. Nov. 4, 1999)[12]. A second participant, who at the time was acting as a school coordinator, succinctly explained his personal view of the whole school experience early in the research process:

> It actually sounds a little bit to me like this 'Whole School Project', although it's designed to open the student [teacher's] eyes up that there is a world beyond your classroom, part of it is also helping student teachers find their own niche. Don't we have our own niche in our schools? Like we all have our own role, our own function? (S.D. April 12, 2000)

This participant's opinion of the whole school experience demonstrated a reflective consideration for both the role of the student teacher as well as the function of the field experience program. Unfortunately, according to many of the cohort, this observation could be made of numerous schools[13], for despite the adoption of the CSI model in over 100 schools, many school coordinators continued to express anxiety when attempting to plan and implement events or whole school experiences at their host schools. As I moved through the first few cycles of the action research process I grew to appreciate that the initial research question was limiting not only my total engagement with the subject, but also the potential involvement of the emerging cohort.

With their input the research question was modified to include the following italicized changes, 'How can *collaborative discussions among site-based preservice teacher educators within* host schools impact the quality of whole school experiences?'

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[11] Over the course of this action research process 14 cooperating teachers and/or school coordinators attended some or all of the 24 sessions. These 14 teachers will be called participants for the remainder of this document. While the contributions of all the participants were valued, eight members of this group chose to sustain their involvement for the entire duration of the study. These eight will be referred to as cohort members in the remainder of this document

[12] While the voice of the eight anonymous participants adds to the texture of the action research discussions, their verbal contributions will be cloaked with a two letter code (their initials). The dates of the comments, however, are authentic.

[13] Including the schools in which I worked before my time and experience on campus and, from the comments made within the collaborative collective, within the cohort research host schools as well.

With this modified question as a guide, the cohort and I began to explore the concept of open-ended discussions and the importance of unscripted discoveries that emerged from within the cohort. Along with these discoveries came a myriad of further questions that sustained the cohort's involvement. After becoming more aware of the subtleties of both the action research orientation and the CSI, I grew to appreciate that the goal of this action research process must also include my revised practice with student teachers as well as the changed practices of those site-based educators involved in the field experience portion of the preservice teacher education program. To instill such changes the action research cohort once again modified our question to include the following underlined revisions, 'How can *collaborative discussions among site based preservice teacher educators within* host schools impact not only the quality of whole school experiences for student teaches but for all educators within the host school?'

With this thrice altered question in mind, the cohort then explored ways in which the entire preservice teacher education process could be viewed as a professional growth activity for in-service teachers as well as for pre-service teachers. To this end a number of initiatives were undertaken by the cohort in the second half of this two-and-a-half-year study including the 1) creation of three conferences for site-based teacher educators, 2) documentation of several site-based best practices with student teachers and 3) recommendations for continued preservice teacher education program improvement for each stakeholder involved in the teacher education process. The cohorts overarching initial research intent was to advocate for a greater amount of information to be made available to site-based preservice teacher educators regarding their roles and responsibilities during field experiences.

Valuing Genuine Dialogue

The third component of preparing the ground work needed for action research was the realization that my practice would also be impacted by the bimonthly sessions with the cohort group. This action research process, therefore, became a direct result of the desire to create a place where "genuine conversations" (Gordon Calvert, 2001, p. 5) about issues

of real concerns about host school field experiences might occur. During the two-and-a-half-year, five-cycle period of this action research, a total of 14 participants attended some of the 24 scheduled meetings. Over the course of this research process, the conversations within these 90 minute, after-school meetings alternated between the pragmatic and the philosophic. Participants questioned not only the whole school experience planned for student teachers during field experiences but also their teaching practices. The research became not so much about our work with student teachers, but more about our work with student teachers in the context of our work lives, which included making room for student teachers.

The shared dialogue was "searching, and the contributions of all [were] valued" (Tom, 1997, p. 192). By having each participant engaged in authentic dialogue within a 'living room' or 'around the kitchen table' setting, concerns could be addressed. The purpose for this research changed once again, and became the desire to facilitate meaningful change in existing field experience practices within host schools by promoting effective dialogue among site-based preservice teacher educators from multiple host schools, which allowed these educators to address their concerns with each other.

Forming a Cohort of Collaborators and Co-researchers

Although all 14 research participants made significant contributions to the body of knowledge, six members chose to take their commitment and involvement in the cohort to a more elevated echelon. Brennan & Noffke (1997) advise that the gathering of data can lead to a closeness among participants when they state, "[d]ata is important because they can provide the focus for developing the relationship of "co-researcher" among group members" (p. 31). These six cohort members consistently assisted in planning numerous conferences or gatherings designed to inform their cooperating teachers, and also sought out the opportunity to attend numerous preservice teacher education events, both within and outside the city of Edmonton.

In addition to their contributions to the improvement of practices with student teachers, each of these 'consistent six' cohort members provided testimonials of how working with

and mentoring teacher candidates changed their classroom practices and challenged their personal reflection skills. Excerpts from dialogue which occurred between cohort members have been added to this document. With their approval the cohort's names have also been included. Information from individual interviews, numerous journals, previously submitted term papers or recently completed Master of Education projects have also been cited. By listening to the voices of these teachers who came together to form a cohort, I honour the intent of their dialogue and the manner in which they wished to introduce themselves to the other participants as well as the eventual readers of this document[14]. I also acknowledge the "contextual, affective, situated, flexible and fluid, esthetic, inter-subjective and grounded" (Britzman, 1991, p. 50) knowledge each of these professionals brought to our kitchen-table meetings. The six members of the action research cohort are, in alphabetical order, Beth, Jackie, Lynn, Marlene, Ninele, and Sherry.

Beth

The story of our first co-researcher is a testimony to the influence of an invitation and the confidence to accept it. As a classroom teacher for nearly 15 years, Beth had, "[n]ever taken a student teacher before becoming involved in the Collaborative Schools Initiative because I didn't think I had anything to offer a student teacher. I never felt competent" (May 15, 2001).

Her participation within the CSI commenced with an invitation to attend the autumn Wine and Cheese social function held at the University of Alberta Faculty Club in the fall of 1998. At the event Beth, and the person who would later become her School Coordinator partner, received information and became "enthralled" with the concepts presented, particularly the emphasis on teamwork and collegiality through dialogue within each host school. Beth first became active within the action research cohort during the first cycle. She then returned to the cohort for the fourth and fifth cycles of the research

[14] As I began to draft this document in the Summer of 2001, I approached each of the cohort members with the idea of using their actual names in print. Each member initially agreed. I then constructed an additional permission form (Appendix B entitled Actual Name in Print Permission Form) and each cohort member signed and returned it.

process.

Jackie

As a first time school coordinator, this 15 year teaching veteran entered the previously established cohort at the start of the 2000/2001 school year after having introduced herself to a number of group members at the autumn Wine and Cheese function at the Faculty Club in the fall of 2000. The transition from initially feeling excluded to becoming a contributing member of the cohort was when she noted that the "other members were really open and concerned for student teachers. It was a nice group of people [and] I have learned a lot from the sessions!" (June 6, 2001). Jackie remained with the cohort for the fourth and fifth cycles of the research.

Lynn

As one of the original three members of the action research cohort "pilot study" from January to April 1999, this educator with 23 years teaching experience initially became involved as a result of hearing the first solicitation to the school board based leadership cohort on January 11, 1999. Made aware of the CSI the previous year, Lynn placed herself in the position of initiating the role of School Coordinator at the same time as she started supervising student teachers as a Cooperating Teacher. As a University of Calgary graduate, Lynn had no prior understanding of the University of Alberta undergraduate program. She sought current local information and advice from informed peers. Like her teaching partner Beth, Lynn first became active within the action research cohort during the first cycle and returned to the cohort for the forth and fifth cycles.

Marlene

Our next cohort member first heard of the action research study during the autumn 1999 Wine and Cheese function and immediately and confidently approached me with her business card. As a grade six academic challenge educator with nearly 20 years classroom

experience in St. Albert, Marlene had also worked as a cooperating teacher for the previous nine years. The last three years, she also served as School Coordinator. A highly regarded educator within her school district, and recognized for her outstanding work with student teachers, this former graduate of the University of Alberta undergraduate program had begun taking evening graduate courses towards a Master of Education degree from the University of Alberta. Marlene remained with the cohort for the second through fifth cycles.

Ninele

This former probation officer and aid worker in Africa returned to campus nearly 20 years after completing her first degree in the liberal Arts to complete a two year "after Degree" program in the Faculty of Education (U of A). As the cohort's most recent graduate of the University of Alberta undergraduate program, this grandmother of five is currently completing her ninth year in the classroom.

Ninele's initial involvement with the group was spurred on after a friend and co-worker heard one of the school board's solicitations[15] and convinced Ninele to attend the first meeting with her. As a cooperating teacher Ninele admitted early on to feeling slightly out of place amongst a cohort of school coordinators. However, her anxiety seemed to subside when she discovered that others in the group were also not currently in the role of school coordinator. Ninele remained with the dialogue discussions for the second through fifth cycles, a time period from the fall of 1999/2000 school year through the end of the 2000/2001 school year.

[15] See Chapter Four for the sub-section entitled Canvassing a School Board Based Cadre.

Sherry

Sherry's original interest in the action research group was initially sparked by reading a Collaborative Chronicles article[16]. This educator with nearly 20 years experience in the classroom gathered further information by approaching me during the Wine and Cheese social function in the autumn of 1999. Sherry, a graduate of both the undergraduate and Master's programs at the University of Alberta was one of the most regularly attending group members for the entire length of the project.

Defining Action Research

In the fall of 1998 I was introduced to the concept of action research. For the next four months I vacillated between embracing the orientation whole heartedly and dismissing it outright. As a practicing classroom teacher who employed, and enjoyed the prosperity of, partnership among my fellow teachers, I appreciated the philosophical emphasis on "social research carried out by a team...." (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 4). I was also impressed with its goals, such as "people describ[ing] their concerns, explor[ing] what others think, and prob[ing] to find what it might be possible to do" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997, p. 9). I was, however, not impressed by its vagueness. This lack of clarity persisted with each text or article I researched and with every discussion in which I participated. As a newly admitted doctoral student, I felt the responsibility for providing a scholarly dissertation in the form of an "original contribution to the field of study" (Bilash, 1999). However I was nagged by a number of questions, one of which was, 'How could I use action research to make "an original contribution to knowledge" (Phillips and Pugh, 1994, p. 34), when I couldn't fully define it?'

This frustration began to subside when I realized that an original contribution did not mean an "enormous breakthrough which has the subject rocking on its foundation"

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[16] The Collaborative Chronicles is a thrice yearly newsletter distributed by the Faculty of Education to promote its field experience initiative.

(Silverman, 2000, p. 55). My anxiety was further appeased when I grew to appreciate that action research had three unique characteristics, which particularly swayed me. These features, discussed in the following subsection, were its non-linear, vicarious approach to knowledge creation and understanding building; its appreciation for knowledge gained from previous inquiry or its "all-at-once" research methodology (Gordon Calvert, 2001, p. 6); and its collaborative mindset, which involves the people who are experiencing the problem.

Vicarious Approach to Knowledge Creation

The first appealing feature of action research was, in fact, its vicarious approach to knowledge creation, an approach I embraced in my classroom practice. I began to see action research as an exploratory, and eventually circular, journey through an unfamiliar landscape -- a terrain consisting of limitless choices from well marked trails to virgin underbrush. The choice of a circular journey for action research acknowledges the migration away from the initial start-up position with an impulse energy, which is an idea or a plan. Moving away from the starting point under the direction of a plan is critical for the success of any new endeavour. As one takes action and moves along a chosen route, one may become aware not only that one is indeed observing new phenomena perhaps for the first time[17] but, as an educational researcher, one also begins to understand that new knowledge is being constructed or existing knowledge is being deconstructed and then reconstituted. As the meandering circular route continues, the traveler may pause to ponder and create new knowledge based on observations within their new surroundings.

At a certain point the circular journey may close in on itself, and the traveler returns to the initial departure point. Anyone who has ever tried to forge through previously unventured terrain will agree with Noffke (1995) who states that, in action research "there are no 'ends' to the cycle" (p. 8). Having experienced all that has gone before, the traveler is changed -- perhaps enlightened -- by actions taken, observations made and insights drawn from the outings. Motivated, the traveler then replans and embarks on a new

[17] Or, perhaps observing a regularly observed occurrence with a new perspective, for the first time.

passage, taking the acquired attributes of recognizing tacit knowledge, encouraging reflective perspective and exploring strategic action with them as they set forth on a completely, or somewhat different, corkscrew-like excursion. This cycle too will eventually return to the initial location and may lead to new discoveries that will impact the traveler, perpetually.

Recognizing Tacit Knowledge within Research

Within this non-linear approach to inquiry, the tacit professional and personal knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) of educators and researchers is highly valued. Greenwood & Levin (1998) speak of the importance of unexpressed but understood knowledge: "[h]uman beings know a great deal more than we can put into words, and unspoken [tacit] knowledge is a key component in competent human action" (p. 101). The argument for human action being based on understood "bodily knowledge" is rooted in the work of Michael Polanyi (1960). It is further emphasized by Palmer (1998) when he suggests that all scientists, including quantitative as well as qualitative researchers, should constantly utilize their tacit intelligence, sometimes called intuition:

> Without tacit knowledge, scientists would be clueless about where to turn for revealing questions, for promising hypotheses, for fruitful intuition and insights about the direction in which truth may lie. The clues that allow us to know anything come from our relatedness to reality -- a relatedness as deep as the atoms our bodies share with everything that is, ever has been, or ever will be. (Palmer, 1998, p. 98)

Action researchers McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1999) also acknowledge the inherent and instinctive emotional sensitivity of researchers:

> Researchers tend to have an intuitive idea about what they want to investigate and the idea begins to tighten up as new insights develop through action and reflection. Sometimes this can take quite a long time, and sometimes a new question, or several new questions, will emerge. (p. 52)

Encouraging Reflective Perspective

Action research also acknowledges that effective educators possess a reflective perspective on their practice. As a classroom teacher and cooperating teacher who contemplated both my classroom practice and an on-site, pre-service teacher education program, I continually cycled back towards action research for its philosophical practicality. While exploring the nuances of the orientation, I realized that I was already doing action research. But then I wondered, 'If I was already doing the research, why would I consider this as a methodology for graduate research?' Kemmis & McTaggart (1997) addressed the same curiosities when they posed the rhetorical question,"But isn't this what every practitioner does?" (p. 10)

I found an answer to these questions within the work of another team of action researchers, Greenwood & Levin (1998). They encourage educators to conduct this form of research with their assurance that action research involves "research methods that enable nonprofessional researchers to enhance their own control over their lives and their social situations" (p. 96). As a classroom teacher who continues to look forward to the seasonal September startup for an opportunity to implement reevaluated lesson plans and reformulated units, this image of venturing out at the start of each year with newly acquired knowledge excites me. With its emphasis on "insider research, [where] every action researcher engages in a form of professional development" (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999, p. 11), this form of research and professional reflection may seem alluring for many involved in school reform and classroom renewal.

Exploring Strategic Action within Action Research

This enthusiasm towards "bringing about an improvement in practice" (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999, p. 13) must be tempered with caution. If action research is reduced to merely the natural practice of planning, acting, monitoring and analyzing, an important learning opportunity may not be fully realized. Action research differs from the practice of reflective teaching in a number of critical respects. One difference is the degree of

academic rigour and literary thoroughness expected of the researcher. Tripp (1990) supports this third distinct feature of action research by providing a cautionary note

> [u]nfortunately, the very naturalness of the cycles of moments leads people to see action research as something done by any practitioner all the time, and totally lacking the necessarily artificial development that characterizes scientific research. This common misconception about action research, however, ignores both the way in which traditional research strategies are located within action research cycles and the notion of strategic action. (p. 159)

This increased understanding can result in additional sensitivity to the subject as well as incremental readings and research within the area of study. However, this simplistic thinking negates the strategic action and academic rigour underpinning this research orientation. The rigour that characterizes action research can best be explained with the term strategic action, which, according to Tripp (1990),

> involves action based on understanding that results from rational analysis of research quality information, in contrast to action that is a result of habit, instinct, opinion, or mere whim on the one hand, and irrelevant, subjective, or incomplete knowledge on the other. (p. 159)

Simply stated, strategic action is the process by which the researcher heightens his/her cognition of the observed events to the echelon where he/she consciously understands and attempts to articulate the situation being scrutinized.

Without this continual check for the links between research process, outcomes and application to problem solving, habitual or instinctive modes of behaviour, while exceedingly popular, successful or professional, will persist and make detailed action research difficult, if not impossible. Having said this, it is important to note that while there is a distinct difference between the deeper action researcher mode of inquiry and good teaching practice, the two should not be separated completely, for action research can result from sound reflective practice. The former builds upon the latter. Greenwood & Levin (1998) refer to these differences by stating, "action research differs starkly from

conventional social research because action researchers insist that research processes, research outcomes, and the application of results to problem solving are inextricably linked" (p. 93).

Without the heightening of understanding with each action research cycle, a repetitive circular orbit, much like a merry-go-round of recurring events, would replay itself. While sharing this same uninterrupted flow of action research, it could be argued that this horizontally flat mode of teaching does not advance the profession. Within this traditionally flat cycle, there is no room for "good teachers who are astute observers of their world" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 40) and wish to question those observations. Like taking the same journey repeatedly, while constantly moving, the existing knowledge of teachers stays confined to the width of a well-worn path, never advancing past dated practices until they become habitual. By failing to fathom that action research must have a "strategic action" (Tripp, 1990, p. 159) component for deeper meaning or heightened understanding, new knowledge will not occur for the classroom teacher or the practitioner/researcher. This depth of understanding is important, for "the educational researcher is called upon to not merely report of existing knowledge but, rather, to generate new knowledge" (Carson & Sumara, 1997, p. xvi). This fresh awareness or new knowledge of educational issues, can only be generated with the employment of a research orientation with an academically rigorous focus. In answering their own rhetorical question cited earlier, Kemmis & McTaggart (1997) explain the difference between reflective practice and action research

> to do action research is to plan, act, observe and reflect more carefully, more systematically, and more rigorously than one usually does in everyday life; and to use the relationships between these moments in the process as a source of both improvement and knowledge. (p. 10)

Perhaps the integral components of action research are its third and fourth stages: observation and reflection or planning for the next step. Action research, therefore, honours the cyclical nature of discovery and learning by validating the need for its practitioner researchers to pause and monitor as well as ponder the possibilities. As a

reflective practitioner and a novice action researcher, I soon discovered that I was already involved in the initial stages of action research each time I periodically stepped back and asked, "What is going on here?" (Strauss & Corbin, 1991, p. 44).

Knowledge Gained from Previous Inquiry

The second feature which enticed me to consider action research was its nature not so much as a methodology, but rather a synergy of procedures which, when brought to bear on an issue, constituted a research orientation (Bilash, 1999). While each of these investigative modules are, in and of themselves, technically not action research, in hindsight each technique could constitute a component of the action research process. As the next three subcategories -- qualitative surveys, spontaneous discussions and informal personal interviews -- will attest, my previous research findings or learning about action research can be thought of as a cycle on the looping journey towards gaining/creating knowledge.

Qualitative Surveys

Early in the pre-action research process two distinctly different, informal, qualitative, "open variety" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997, p 102) surveys were developed. The first was delivered to my teaching peers and the second to teacher candidates within the host school in which I worked at the time. Kemmis & McTaggart (1997) also suggest that administering these types of unilateral questionnaires can be "useful for gathering information in the exploratory stages" (p. 102). However, they also caution that inquiries of this type could both "produce responses which are difficult to correlate [and] response rates may be low" (p. 102). The dismal return rate[18], typical of surveys, was disheartening. Even before the disappointing numerical results of the survey had been discovered, the shift away from the "natural science preoccupation with 'explaining' to the humanities interest in 'understanding'" (Ellis, 1998, p. 8) was felt. Stringer (1996) validates this values-focused orientation by suggesting, "[v]alues cannot be separated

[18] Of 38 questionnaires passed out a total of 6 were returned.

from the core of an inquiry by the simple expedient of claiming objectivity, for findings are literally created by the inquiry process. And that process is permeated by values at every step" (p. xi).

Kvale (1996) supports the researcher's need to create value within the research process when he states that:

> Qualitative methods are not merely some new, soft technology added to the existing hard-core quantitative arsenal of the social sciences. Rather, the mode of understanding implied by qualitative research involves alternative conceptions of social knowledge, of meaning, reality, and truth in social science research. (p. 10)

In hindsight, I now appreciate that writing these surveys constituted a series of mini action-research loops in the much larger formal action research process. While I gathered the results, I observed that three of the four cooperating teachers augmented their written responses with personal accounts while passing in their forms. After this phenomena occurred the second time in as many days, I noted that the first two teachers seemed to need time to clarify their responses verbally, as if the writing process had not provided a sufficient opportunity for them to express their opinions, thoughts or feelings with regards to field experience issues. This verbal necessity on the part of cooperating teachers prompted me to choose instead to read the two replies as I would a conversation, for, despite the underwhelming response, many powerful suggestions for whole school field experience program improvement were made. For example, one cooperating teacher suggested that she would like to know more information regarding student teacher expectations before the field experience commencement date. One student teacher asked for name tags to be worn -- by student teachers and all staff members of the host school. According to Kemmis & McTaggart (1997), "trialling questions [on peers or small samples of respondents] will invariably suggest improvements" (p 102).

Spontaneous Discussions

I then engaged in a number of impromptu and informal chats with school personnel and student teachers, which was more akin to my teaching and personal practice of information sharing and gaining new ideas and perspectives. In each dialogue occasion, with myself as the question asker, cooperating teachers, school support staff and student teachers all seemed much more available to discuss their concerns and ideals for whole school field experience program improvement. This shift towards re-evaluating the importance of dialogue and relationship building was partially accomplished when it was recognized that I enjoyed, and am comfortable with, dialogue and discussion. At the time I was pleased I was able to ask the questions that allowed for "creating situations where knowledge and understanding are *produced* through the process of inquiry" (Sumara & Carson, 1997, p. xviii), and that I was able to facilitate an environment where genuine responses would be volunteered. These collegial discourses seemed to be a reconnaissance (Lewin, 1946) and consisted of genuine inquiries as to the emotional state of the individual or to the practical pragmatic concerns about, or suggestions for, the field experience program facilitated within the host school.

The term reconnaissance, in this context, first originated with Lewin (1946) and was used to obtain "a general view of the field and its characteristics" (Tripp, 1990, p. 159). This view allowed for a richer depiction of what was occurring school wide and provided input for suggested changes in the next field experience rotation with student teachers. Although the desire to converse with the participants in order to gain a view of field experience within our host school was sincere, I now appreciate that these dialogues could have been conducted differently. Gadamer (1989) explains conversational craft when he clarifies the sincerity of a genuine conversation with another:

> We say that we "conduct" a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. (p. 383)

While it would be pleasant to argue that my own practice with regards to the supervision, instruction and mentoring of student teachers was honed and strengthened as a result of these conversations, instead I realized that this type of discourse was problematic on multiple levels. In a quick, cursory chat at a photocopier, with the bell slated to ring in three minutes, individuals could not possibly delve into deep underlying issues about anything. While time may have been one inhibiting factor, the dictates of social dynamics may also have restrained sincerity, or the voicing of concerns, within an informal conversation. I learned rather quickly, that while falling into a conversation (Gadamer, 1989) with either student teachers or with cooperating teachers, diplomacy may dictate that the conversation be continued at a more discrete time and place. Despite being problematic, these spontaneous conversations created additional knowledge which further fueled my interest in the topic of preservice teacher education and, like the surveys, constituted a departure point for the action research cycle.

Informal Personal Interviews

To complement the surveys and spontaneous discussions already explored, a number of "unstructured or nonstandardized" (Kvale, 1996, p. 13) yet in-depth, informal individual interviews were initiated in the fall of 1998. This third attempt at gaining background information occurred while functioning as both a full-time doctoral student as well as a University Facilitator[19]. While in host schools, I invited student teachers to volunteer their ideas and suggestions for host school field experience improvements to me in interviews. During this time I tried to act as a non-judgmental sounding board and "research instrument" (Kvale, 1996, 147). Immediately I was struck not only by the number of respondents[20] but by the responses, for the comments made and questions asked by the students were far richer than I anticipated. Many of these well thought out concerns or suggestions were implemented immediately, or taken into consideration and established during the next most appropriate opportunity.

[19] Please read the section entitled 'University Facilitator - Non-evaluative Advocate' in Chapter Three.

[20] Of a possible 12 student teachers, eight sought the opportunity to engage in a series of "research interviews [which] proceed[ed] rather like a normal conversation but ha[d] a specific purpose and structure" (Kvale, 1996, p. 130).

It was during the initial informal interviews that I was also reminded not only of the power of dialogue as a relationship building tool but that dialogue is like an interview. Atkinson & Silverman have suggested that "we all live in what might be called an 'interview society' in which interviews seem central to making sense of our lives" (Silverman, 2000, p. 90). Each preservice teacher seemed comfortable and quite animated talking about both their experiences within the host school to date and their suggestions for whole school experience program improvements. Together, we became "caught up in the phenomenon being discussed" (Weber, 1986, p. 65) and at times, forgot that an interview was taking place. Again, Gadamer (1986) explains the randomness of genuine discussions:

> The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will 'come out' of a conversation. (p. 383)

For example, many spoke of the anxiety associated with being within a student teaching cohort within a host school. The pressure to assume extra-curricular activities was particularly crushing for some student teachers who were experiencing difficulties within their placements. Others expressed disappointment that the supportive climate originally nurtured from within cohort members was compromised near the end of the field experience as the pressure of a tight employment market was felt.

While the new knowledge was appreciated, the subsequent and deeper understanding of the personal processes involved in field experience was a gift. These peoples' insightful observations placed me in the role of a learner. I felt a need to undertake a "review [of the] literature on the basis of what was discovered....." (Strauss & Corbin, 1991, p. 43). With this understanding deeper, richer research was commenced. Sumara & Carson (1997) validate the act of self reflection in light of results and suggest improvements when they assert that action research is a "lived practice that requires that the researcher not only investigate the subject at hand but, as well, provide some account of the way in which the investigation both shapes and is shaped by the investigator" (p. xiii). What

was uncovered within the reading and personal writing was that a good interviewer is an expert in the topic of the interview as well as in human interaction (Kvale, 1996) and as a result I needed to become much more knowledgeable in both areas.

Collaborative Mindset

The third interesting feature of action research is its alignment with the cooperative canon proposed within the modified Faculty of Education (U of A) field experience program referred to as the CSI. This initiative has two important cornerstones: 1) its acknowledgment of the critical importance cooperating teachers fulfill in their role as site-based preservice teacher educators[21] and 2) the ability of school coordinators to problem solve at each host school. The infusion of these action research ideals into the CSI are supported by researchers Greenwood & Levin (1998):

> On theoretical grounds, action researchers believe that those who face social problems have much of the information and analytical capacity needed to solve them. Action researchers weigh the knowledge of local people much more heavily than do orthodox researchers. (p. 96)

While searching for a methodology that not only aligned itself with my classroom bias and personal forestructures (Ellis, 1998) but also with the beliefs and goals of the Collaborative School Initiative, I uncovered the tacit assumption underlying action research, that is, that members, including the research facilitator, were to be considered equals or partners in the knowledge discovery process (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997; McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999). Action researchers support this egalitarian belief. (Stringer, 1996) assert that, "the assumption is that those who have previously been designated as "subject" should participate directly in research processes and that those processes should be applied in ways that benefit all participants directly" (p. 7).

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[21] Chapter Three is dedicated to an exploration of both the Collaborative Schools Initiative and the University of Alberta, Faculty of Education undergraduate program.

The goal of this action research, therefore, became 'How best to affect meaningful change within the quality of whole school experiences?'. To improve the quality it was decided that conversation between school-based preservice teacher educators must occur. Participants in the research process would need to come together to establish a community of researchers/learners with the goal to share stories, discuss, plan, implement and report back on their accomplishments. In order for this community to gather, without fear of being judged or refereed, a high degree of trust and truth would need to occur. Palmer (1998) weaves his perspective of the cyclical direction of this emergent community of truthful researchers, and how it relates to human acquisition of knowledge and professional growth when he maintains:

> The richness of the community of truth lies in the fact that its process is nonlinear. Its tracks lead in diverse directions, sometimes circling back on themselves, sometimes jumping far ahead. In the midst of this creative chaos, the teacher [or participant and/or researcher] must know when and how to draw a straight line by connecting comments that have been made, revealing a trajectory of inquiry that can both confirm what we know and take us somewhere new. (p. 135)

In order for a truthful community to be established within our action research cohort a number of attributes, all of which share characteristics of the CSI need to be explored more closely. They are the facilitation of continual professional growth, the need to nurture relationship building within the practice of living and the use of dialogue as a data gathering technique.

Facilitating Continual Professional Growth

Once committed to being an action researcher, I needed to create a safe dwelling place for myself within action research -- I needed to allow myself the freedom to meander through the pathways of action research, to make mistakes, and to be a novice action researcher. McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1999) support this argument and observe, "[a]ction research, in a sense, is insider research, and every action researcher engages in a form of professional development" (p. 11). Like novice teachers who are encouraged to choose a

process of teaching that fits who they are (Beauchamp & Parson, 1998; Levin & Nolan, 1996; Posner, 1993; Zabel & Zabel, 1996), I needed to create an action research model that fit me. Action research acknowledges this personal connectedness and affirms the importance of investigating our daily lived practice by "aiming to live our values in our work" (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999, p. 38). As a novice researcher I owed it to myself not only to find an orientation that was consistent with my preunderstanding of "bringing personal relationships to practical problems" (J. Ellis, personal communication, May 5, 1999), but also to find a model that worked best for me and allowed me to strive for purposeful and personal connections within the context of pre-service teacher education. Schultz and Yang (1997) suggested, "[i]f you pour your heart into your work, or into any worthy enterprise, you can achieve dreams others may think impossible" (p. 8).

Building Relationships within the Practice of Living

The recurring themes of collaborative discussions, relationship building and personal attachment are evident as being powerful in the developing lives of the teacher candidates and those people who mentor them within host schools as well as in my life. The pursuit of a research orientation that had at its core many of the values and beliefs I found applicable and successful in my practice as a classroom teacher was imperative. As I moved from being a classroom teacher who was a reflective practitioner to becoming a researcher, I needed to remember that becoming a researcher did not mean disregarding my personal and professional involvement with the people involved in effecting meaningful change within the subject (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997; McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999).

These values are, of course, contrary to the suggestions of Bogdan & Biklen (1982), who argue for the movement towards impersonal research practices by stating that "researchers do not have a personal stake in the way in which results come out" (p. 40). As a practitioner/researcher I was allowed to pursue areas of interest in the hopes of acquiring more knowledge and understanding. Because of lived experiences within the

area, I had a personal interest not only in the people as they explored the topic but in whatever results might occur. Therefore, as I initiated this research, I sought to impact the quality of learning experiences for student teachers by employing the ideals of collaboration between site-based teacher educators. What I did not appreciate at the time was that the quality of learning for cooperating mentor teachers, school coordinators and, to a certain extent, all staff within host schools would also be positively affected by the eventual work of the action research cohort. The cohort would eventually return to their host schools and attempt to model the community building they experienced within the action research cadre.

By engaging in action research the seven cohort members, including myself, began to allow ourselves to work towards building a relationship were personal professional knowledge formation, with the potential for reform in our professional practice and host school sites, was accomplished. While working forward towards problem solving and the advancements of our personal professional practices, we allowed ourselves the opportunity to glance sideways, backwards and inwards, at our peers, our pasts and ourselves. This reform through relationship building resides in the very heart[22] of the educator, for it is hoped that (s)he too has experienced the self knowledge discussed previously. McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1999) in summarizing this emotive component of action research cite a number of additional researchers "A number of recent publications have celebrated the importance of feeling [Dadds, 1995: Whitehead, 1995], or shown the need for an awareness of affective aspects that inform practice [Collins and McNiff, 1999; Laidlaw, 1994]" (p. 9). In addition to my intuitive self, there is also my spiritual, emotive identity. Just as I had as a teacher created spaces for students and student teachers "to become actively and collectively engaged in their learning" (Hawreluk & McIntosh, 1999), I needed to locate a research style that would not only resolve issues in pre-service teacher education but also allow me the same opportunities for personal engagement and professional growth. With its emphasis on profound personal and professional relationship development, in combination with "attempt[ing] to press for

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[22] Heart in the ancient sense, a place where intellect, emotion, spirit and will converge in the human self (Palmer, 1999, p. 11).

more consequential reforms" (Huberman, 1993, p. 7), I discovered the action research orientation to be akin to practices I lived. Van Manen (1990) suggests "[t]he aim of action research is to reconceive how the notions of theory and research are to be related to the practice of living" (p. 153). It is my belief that theory is the rigor that not only informs, but sustains and strengthens how I have chosen to live my teaching practice.

Gathering Data through Autobiographical Reflection

Regardless of the mode of research I would eventually choose as my orientation, I would need to honour the heart of my autobiographical voice. One piece of particularly useful advice is that "it may be necessary to gather large amounts of data" (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999, p. 39) in the research process. Kemmis & McTaggart's (1997) suggest that action researchers

> make time to write throughout your project. ... Write at the beginning (planning), during the project (collecting your observations, reflective writing, re-planning) and at the various 'endings' your project has (the end of a stage, the end of a term, the end of a year). (p. 27)

Following this advice, I revisited a number of stories written either as an undergraduate while taking a number of introductory counseling courses, or early in my teaching career as I embarked on a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education (U of A). Revisiting these "narrative fragments" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17), I was transported back to a place where I could witness my evolution as an educator who was making meaning of what was being experiencing. Sumara & Carson (1997) note that personal reflective writing "reveals a writer who did not exist, in the same form, before the act of writing" (p. xv). By being asked to articulate, in writing, a philosophy of education during my "career entry phase" (Huberman, 1993, p. 5), I was continuously framing and reframing my classroom practice. The importance of personal reflection as a tool for forming an approach to work in education is echoed in the Kemmis & McTaggart's (1997) observation, "not only must we have a general historical understanding: we must also have some historical self-understanding -- an understanding of our own educational

autobiographical (our personal histories) and the ways our ideas about education have been formed" (p. 55). These backward glances allowed me to realize that my first forays as an autobiographical researcher positioned me in a place where I could eventually question more deeply, assess more sincerely and act more purposely than I would have otherwise.

Autobiographical reflection was a pivotal component of this action research process. Through critical self-reflection I uncovered that my passionate commitment to teaching and preservice teacher education was a consequence of the relationship building I observed, participated in and benefited from. Whether it was the relationships I experienced as a young child, a grade school student, a teaching protégé and more recently as a teaching mentor and university course instructor, all were nurtured with significant mentors and peers during formative times.

For many within the cohort autobiographical discussions allowed for the emergence of self-knowledge, and as Palmer (1998) has suggested, "self-knowledge is as critical to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject" (p. 2) and has confirmed that the area of personal professional practice (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) and growth that we felt most passionate about was mentoring student teachers.

I also learned that the person I am affects my practice in much the same way that my practice affects my person. I understand more clearly now that my career, my life as an educator and a person who teaches, *is* my project. Where I end as a researcher and where I begin as a person who teaches is indistinguishable. Not only do I hope to impact teaching with my research, but I -- and my teaching -- have been impacted by the research process. Journal entries were replaced with a computer generated journal. Due to its chronological nature this journal not only served to record my emergent thoughts and feelings regarding education and personal discoveries, it also constituted my field notes and reflections of observed events or insightful readings. Therefore, this diary has run through my development from reflective practitioner to practitioner researcher to finally, as of this writing, novice action researcher.

Choosing an Action Research Model

While slight variations occur within the literature, all action research models employ and encourage a somewhat overlapping circular composition while engaged in the knowledge creation process[23]. I found this particularly critical as I prepared for the action research sessions but also as I observed discussion within the cohort as the research process commenced.

In addition to allowing myself the freedom to move through the orientation and create meaning within action research, I also needed to explore the multiple variations of action research. While undertaking a graduate course exploring research possibilities, I began to ask many questions regarding the desired outcomes and expectations of this particular research model. According to Stringer (1996) "different formations of action research reflect the diverse ways in which the same set of activities may be described, even though the processes they delineate are very similar. There are, after all, many ways of cutting a cake" (p. 16).

While it would seem that a multitude of action researchers/authors acknowledge and pay homage to Lewin (1946) as the patriarch of this research orientation, a variety of action research models have emerged. For each model there is also a researcher proposing the employment of his/her technique, a point addressed by Greenwood & Levin (1998):

> Action research has many proponents, and several different groups would like to claim they know the "right" way to do Action Research, whereas others reject the name entirely, preferring (often for sensible reasons) another term (such as *participatory research, human inquiry, or action science*). Occasionally, some practitioners are ignorant or intolerant of each other's work. Although we are well aware that our review is not

[23] Action research encourages the venturing off on, and the eventual overlapping of, the similar path with the goal of acquiring new information which leads to producing understanding and therefore eventually creates and builds knowledge. To extend the metaphor further, it is necessary to state that each circle may have a different constitution of sizes. Some explorations may meander and take great lengths of time. Other discourse may occur rapidly, returning the researcher to the starting point quickly. A more detailed explanation of each model will be undertaken later in this chapter.

> likely to win us friends in all groups, we persist in presenting our own view of the field.... (p. 9, 10)

As a result of this discovery numerous action research methods have been explored in order to generate an orientation best suited to this particular research study. From each model a component of the acquired knowledge has been added. At this time a brief explanation and rationale of the four primary models of action research, Tom (1997), Tripp (1990), Stringer (1996) and Kemmis & McTaggart (1997) is undertaken.

Alan Tom --'Family Style Change'

Speaking primarily to an audience of campus-based academics and preservice teacher educators, Tom (1997) proposed a number of preservice teacher education reforms, some of which consisted of a "nonlinear approach in which planning is a recurring process" (p. 190). Using a process that encourages meandering and honest discourse, Tom (1997) advocates the important role that campus-based educators could play in creating a "[f]amily-style strategy, [which] disavows any linear attempt to develop an overall blueprint before initiating the change process" (p. 187). He also speculates that "the potential for personal and programmatic reward is so great that a teacher education faculty is well advised to pursue the kind of dialogue that characterizes a family approach to change" (p. 192).

While Tom makes no mention of the term action research while describing this style of educational change, its cyclical employment of theoretical spontaneity -- coupled with his emphasis on dialogue as a central means for creating a community of pertinent question askers --spoke to me of action research. Later as I was to commence with the action research orientation, the need to let go of the preordained, blueprint mentality of reform and be open to creating places where ideas and ideals for change could present themselves from interested participants became appreciated. Instead of a fixed blueprint observed and noted as a child[24], "the diagram for educational change and reform would need to be

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[24] Please read the prelude section of this document entitled, THE ORIGINS OF A CAREGIVER

continually erased and redrawn" (Tom, 1997, p. 191) and therefore became the foremost concern. While not a research orientation, I took from this change strategy the notion that one must be comfortable with the intermittent cadence within cohort group discussions, for "change unfolds in chunks, often in fits and starts, perhaps with twists and turns ... the destination itself may be altered in the midst of the journey" (Tom, 1997, p. 188).

E.T. Stringer -- 'Community Based'

In Action Research: A Handbook for Practitioners, Stringer (1996) talks extensively about "Community-Based" action research. Within this document he emphasizes the importance of "bottom-up" or "grassroots orientations [which] use stakeholding groups as the primary focus of attention and source of decision making" (p. 23). By advocating flat organizational structures as a decision making model, Stringer's ideas struck a resonate chord and reminded me of the importance of valuing the members of the cohort. As an educator who abhors the hierarchical model employed within many schools and school districts, I was immediately drawn to this orientation. Stringer (1996) also proposes a three-step research process consisting of the steps, "Look, Think and Act" (p.17) as a way of creating conditions that will create energy, engage enthusiasm and generate activity all geared to resolution of issues and problems (p. 25). I was also interested in

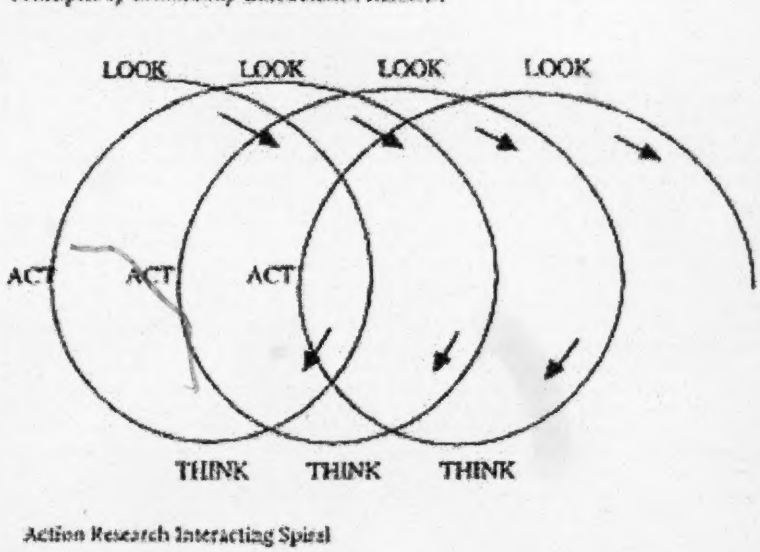

Figure 1: Community-Based Action Research

exploring this orientation further because buried within the three phases of the cycles, were seven routines (p. 16).

While Stringer (1996) may not have proposed a merger between his action research orientation and the work of Benjamin Bloom, while exploring the Stringer's seven stages (see box below) a similarity to the work of Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), was noted. For example, while gathering data (stage one) the action researcher could also be acquiring knowledge and/or comprehending information. The final stage is far more obvious with both sharing the 'evaluate' classification.

	A Basic Action Research Routine
Look	• Gather relevant information (Gather data)
	• Build a picture: Describe the situation (Define and describe)
Think	• Explore and analyze: What is happening here?" (Hypothesize)
	• Interpret and explain: How/why are things as they are? (Theorize)
Act	• Plan (Report)
	• Implement
	• Evaluate

While Stringer (1996) has been cited heavily within this document for his ideas about action research, I have difficulty appreciating the three step process he proposes (Figure 1), for it lacks a reflective component that I have found beneficial in my practice and research. Having said this, I can, however, easily understand his visual representation of the continually overlapping action research cycles as they move horizontally across the page.

David H. Tripp – 'Socially Critical' Action Research

Tripp (1990) proposed 'Socially Critical' action research as a four-stage process that includes "planning, acting, fact-finding and then analyzing" (p. 159). Tripp cautions his readers that making assumptions while conducting action research can be dangerous and may lead to the inability to challenge an aspect of existing social order (p. 158). Despite the cyclical similarities between this ideal and the preceding model, there are subtle

differences.

In addition to describing briefly a four-step action research spiral which ascends, Tripp (1990) advocates the consideration of five essential characteristics of social critical action research, which are is as follows:

Five Characteristics of Socially Critical Action Research

• Participation • Direction • Consciousness • Constraints • Outcomes

With respect to the first two characteristics, "Participation" and "Direction," it is stressed that "research is most effective when done by mutually supported groups of teachers" (p. 161). Tripp also cautions that teachers may be leery of projects that come from "above" (p. 162). With this advice firmly adhered to, the third characteristic, "Consciousness," can be explored in the context of exploring one's "world view, including the values embedded in one's lifestyle, aspirations, ideology and habits" (p. 162). It is, to summarize, everything that brought a participant to the moment (Ellis, personal communication, May 6, 1999). The fourth and fifth characteristics, "Constraints and Outcomes," acknowledge that certain limits either perceived or real exist in each situation and the outcome may either be a change to an existing practice or an altogether new practice (Stringer, 1990, p. 163).

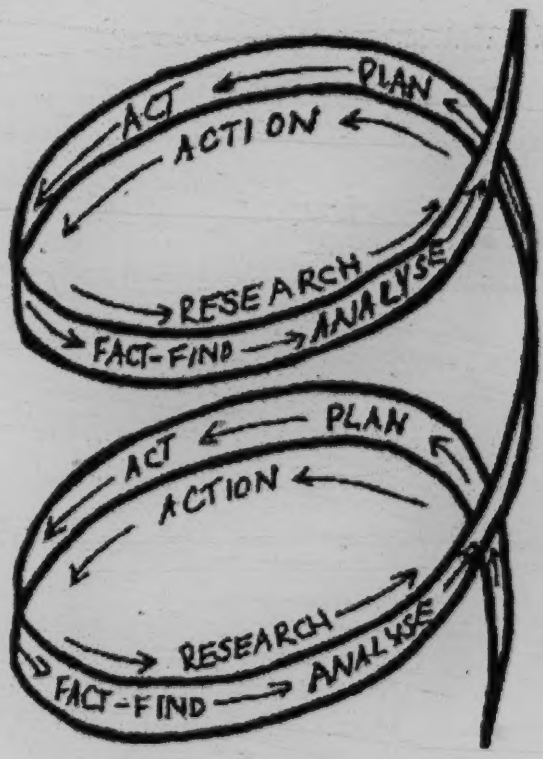

Figure 2: Socially Critical Action Research

Perhaps it was because their book, The Action Research Planner (1997), was written as a guide for an intended audience of "teachers and administrators interested in improvement and change in their schools" (p. 5) that I was more easily drawn to this interpretation of the research orientation. Their interpretation of action research constitutes the greatest portion of my research towards methodological model, for it mandates researchers to *plan, act, observe* and *reflect*.

With their encouragement I moved from thinking about to initiating action research, for action is a necessary precursor to reflection. The planning and acting phases spoke to me of the "training" I was exposed to throughout my undergraduate degree, which consisted primarily of planning and then administering lessons. Only later as an abbreviated and supplemental field

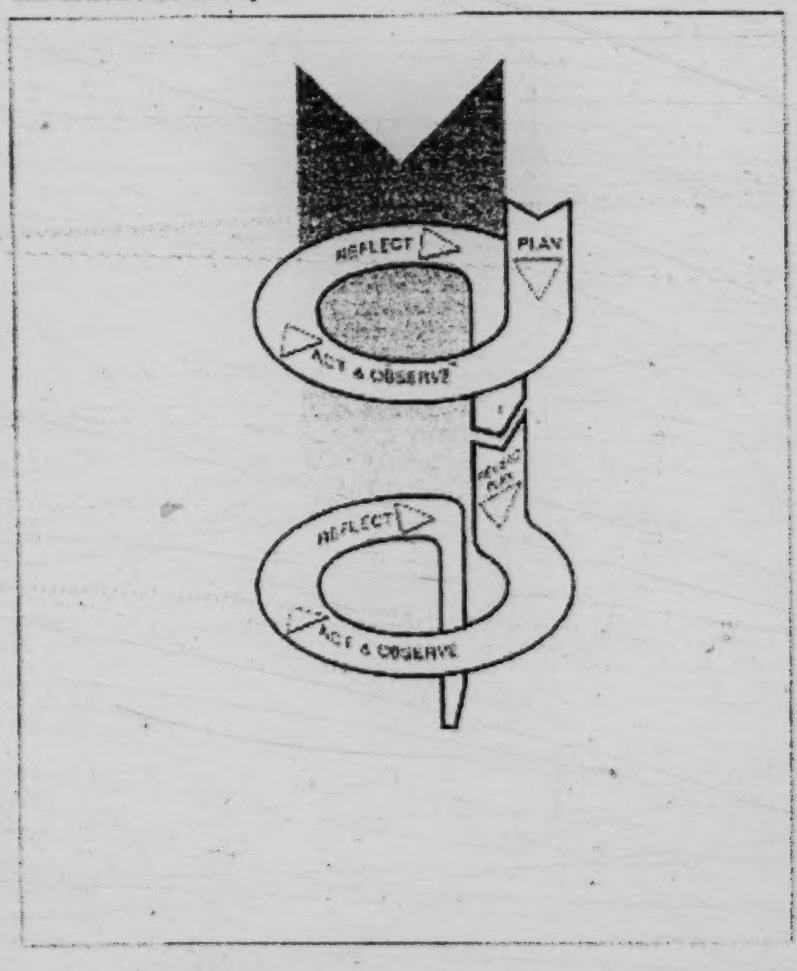

Figure 3: Kemmis & McTaggart

experience student and subsequently as a Master's student studying early childhood development, was I encouraged to develop a skills set that allowed me to: 1) observe children as they engaged in their learning, 2) then reflect on the behaviours observed (Oswald, 1987). I was reacquainted with reflection within an academic setting during a course in the fall of 1999 and have since learned to appreciate that, "[t]he focus of the action research was the implementation of reflective practices in teacher education" (Carson, 1997, p. 78).

Chapter Synopsis

In this chapter an overview of both the rationale for choosing an action research orientation as well as a detailed explanation of the specifics for four models were detailed. Also included in this chapter was an explanation that although 14 site-based preservice teacher educators took part in some, or all, of the 24 sessions of this research, six people from this larger group became more engaged in the action research process. Members of this action research cohort have chosen to introduce themselves within this document. In the next chapter an historical understanding of preservice teacher education practices in western Canada is shared. Along with this regional perspective a detailed appreciation will be shared regarding the current preservice teacher education program at the University of Alberta. Included in this explanation will be a description of the Collaborative Schools Program.

CHAPTER 3:

TEACHER EDUCATION

While it is widely agreed that the demands on teacher/educators have intensified within the last few decades, many educational researchers argue that classrooms, schools and the way in which teacher candidates are prepared for the classrooms have remained consistent with the model first established with the advent of public schooling (Dryden, 1995; Gardner, 1999; Osborne, 1999). After all, in North America children still arrive at or near 8:30 a.m. each morning to gather in age appropriate groups of approximately 30 students, where they will sit and listen to teachers who are [usually] positioned at the front of each room. Learners do this five days a week for ten of the 12 months of the year. In this chapter I review North American preservice teacher education practices in general and at the University of Alberta in particular. A number of questions, self-questions, concerns and self-concerns are raised. Britzman (1991) supports the tenets of questioning and cognition.

> Learning to teach -- like teaching itself -- is always the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become (p. 8).

These concerns and questions are grouped into three sections. In the first section, entitled "Historical Understanding of Preservice Teacher Education," a widespread historical perspective of teacher preparation within the western Canadian context is presented. An understanding of the place for both practice and theory is explored. The second section, entitled "The Current U of A Pre-Service Teacher Education Program," describes the field experience components of the undergraduate program within the larger context of the academic component. The third section, entitled "Strengthening Professional Relationships," highlights the emergent roles of both the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta with regard to their current mission of creating or facilitating ongoing partnerships with host schools.

Historical Understanding of Preservice Teacher Education

To contextualize the current undergraduate Bachelor of Education program at the University of Alberta, it is necessary to examine the origins of teacher education on the Canadian prairies. This story will be told in three subsections -- the making of a teacher (pre 1945), the rise of professionalism (1945 - 1985) and nurturing critically reflective practitioners (1985 - present). When contemplating variations in preservice teacher education, Tom (1997) cautions that "change in teacher education programming will continue to be superficial and tenuous until the multiple sources of the 'problem' of teacher education are recognized and explicitly addressed" (p. 2). The concern is that if the undergraduate program focuses primarily on perpetuating previous beliefs, the individual teachers who graduate, and therefore the profession itself, will not proceed past the technician stage of only knowing what to do, and not understanding why it should be done that way (Yewchuk, 1987).

The Making of a Teacher (pre - 1945)

Historical researchers such as Carney and Hodysh (1994) and Tyack (1995) make the case that educators of the early west were either ill prepared for the classroom or, if educated, prepared for a vocation other than that of teaching. An overview of the historical documentation reveals numerous situations in which a career in the classroom prior to 1930 would be initiated either by default, if you were a male, or short lived if you were female[1]. Teacher historian J.W. Chalmers (1968) states that

> ... originally, the schools of the western prairies were dependent on teachers trained -- or untrained -- in other parts of the world. The west's earliest teachers were frequently clergymen, Protestant or Roman Catholic, with no professional training in education. Even when they were laymen, they generally had no training for the vocation to which circumstances or interest had called them. (p. 407)

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[1] It was common for young female teachers to be asked to resign their teaching assignment once they were married.

This assertion regarding the lack of education or training of pioneer teachers is supported by researchers such as Wubbels, Levy and Brekelmans (1997) who postulate that:

> We've been searching for the Effective Teacher for more than a century (Borish, 1998). In the 1800's, he or she was usually thought of as a good person, an honourable citizen, well educated, and hard working. No special skills were necessary, other than being well organized, disciplined, authoritative and dedicated to children. (p. 82)

Again J.W. Chalmers (1968) supports this argument by citing the story of Andrew Sibbald, who turned to teaching when, as a result of an industrial accident, a trade in master carpentry was no longer possible (p. 78). With no special skills required or involvement in teaching due to defaulted career choices, the perpetuation of a professional inheritance of communal knowledge was difficult to establish. It was even more difficult to sustain or advance this communal knowledge when members of the teaching population were forced to remove themselves upon marriage or were begrudgingly in the classroom because of limited career options.

During the era proceeding 1945 preservice teacher education consisted of 1) apprentices conforming to expected standards and 2) learning what they had to -- while on-the-job.

Apprentice Conforming to Expected Standards

Despite the progressive educational theorists of the day, such as Dewey, schools and the institutions that "trained" teacher candidates prior to 1945 perpetuated a mentality that saw the "neophyte professional [as] being consciously shaped by another, the trainer" (Lacey, 1987, p. 637). Implicit in the apprenticeship model was the understanding that required the novice teacher to

> observe the teacher at work and then attempt to emulate them. Implicit in this model was a dichotomy between the [student teacher] pupil - [cooperating] teacher's own academic study and the acquisition of teaching skills. There was little sense that the two may be intimately connected and, in reality, achieving either was a matter of chance. (Brooks & Sikes,

1997, p.17)

This shaping and molding of potential teachers towards a consistent benchmark emulated the factory model which was prevalent in the rapidly industrializing world at that time. Under this assembly-line mindset "learners are cast as consumers or clients, education is a product, teachers are labour resources and knowledge is a commodity" (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. xiii). This industrial lock-step teacher training also implied conformity (Britzman, 1991, p. 28) and perpetuated the role of teacher as able to give answers (Hawreluk and McIntosh, 1999). Bergan (1992) supports this view by stating that "the apprenticeship model rested on the premise that learning results from observation and emulation" (p. 7). Researchers such as Brooks & Sikes (1997) also have very strong opinions of the apprenticeship model of preservice teacher education:

> Critics claim that it [the apprenticeship model] produces unthinking automatons who can reproduce behaviour both without intelligent skills knowledge or the possibility of further professional development. (p. 18)

It was this skill and proficiency environment that permeated the profession and its Normal School "training"[2] mindset and permitted it to laud a "product based" learning system which featured an absolute beginning and finite end point, where teacher candidates knew all they would ever need to know upon completion of their time in Normal School.

On - the - Job Training

The second reality for beginning teachers prior to 1945 was that "teachers appeared to identify themselves with the farming-labour-low salaried segment of society, in other words, the level which sociologists identify as lower middle class" (Chalmers, 1968, p. 81), for during this era teacher education was conceived of as synonymous with

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[2] Training which is analogous to a business metaphor in which parts are identical and therefore replaceable. Teachers are trained to become a component within a long line of successive parts in a machine that produces a finished product, children. Individuality amongst and between teaching professionals is not encouraged and actively discouraged.

vocational preparation (Britzman, 1991, p. 29). As such, for teachers of this era the amount and depth of their theoretical understanding was minimal, if existent. Becoming a teacher at this time was very much considered on-the-job training, with educators detached and isolated from their peers, often by many miles. When a novice teacher entered the schoolhouse or a classroom, they entered a zone where the total accumulated knowledge regarding teaching and, some would argue, learning "how to teach" (Britzman, 1991; Chalmers, 1968; Chalmers, 1967; Goodman, 1986) was nonexistent. Therefore, the profession was charged with reinitiating survival mode strategies for novice teachers (Huberman, 1993) with each new placement in the field. To counteract this acknowledged lack of training, teacher magazines[3] of the time possessed sections that,

> ... stressed a teachers' help department consisting of "how to" articles, probably very welcome to poorly prepared teachers isolated in one-room country schools (Chalmers, 1968, p. 79).

This form of cyclical disenfranchisement within the teaching population could only, and eventually did, lead to the perpetuation of classroom practices based on "best guess" routines. The finality of teacher knowledge and the abandonment mode of teacher survival was typical of Alberta preservice teacher training before the Second World War (Hodysh, 2000).

The Rise of Professionalism (1945 - 1985)

Perhaps the grandest advancement in the professionalization of teaching in Alberta occurred immediately after WWII with the dissolution of three provincial normal schools in 1945 (Carney & Hodysh, 1994; Carson, 1995) and the placement of teacher education within the University of Alberta setting. Once the normal schools in Edmonton, Camrose and Calgary went out of existence, "the teaching profession had achieved its first objective of having all teacher education university based" (Williams, 1995, p. 19). By

[3] This is most noticeably the precursor to the current ATA magazine.

professionalizing[4] teaching (Chalmers, 1968) it was assumed that teachers possessed a "defined body of knowledge and skills that is held in common by practitioners in the field and not generally possessed by the lay public" (Corrigan & Haberman, 1990, p. 195). Despite the lauded achievement of having preservice teacher education "belonging with a university faculty of education" (Williams, 1995, p. 20), it also proved problematic, for, according to Corrigan & Haberman (1990)

> [a]n occupation does not become a profession by announcing it is, or even by preparing people to function at a high level of competence. A professional must have the autonomy, authority, and resources to act on his or her knowledge in the actual work setting. (p. 196)

As such, academic institutions and professional organizations were forced to determine which model of both institutional education and field experience programming to offer. The search for an appropriate, effective and efficient method of preservice teacher education would prove to be problematic in at least two ways, the scrutinizing of desired characteristics of teacher candidates once they complete the program as well as an examination of how much dependence on proven practice (from the pre-existing normal school experience) should be incorporated into the campus based model.

Desired Professional Characteristics

During the 40 years between 1945 and 1985, society and the profession itself began to explore the characteristics classroom teachers should possess. Questions began to be asked of those responsible for planning and implementing preservice teacher education as to what experiences, including length of undergraduate program, would best nurture qualified novice teachers. In its desire for scientific accreditation within the larger university community, many faculties of education perpetuated the normal schools' practices of seeking out and educating prospective teachers who would agree to accept the preordained cultural body of knowledge about teaching (White, 1989, p. 192). While the

[4] Alberta was the first province in Canada to make teacher education exclusively a university responsibility (University of Alberta, Course Calender, 2002-2003, p. 60).

profession celebrated its noble enhancement, practica[5] immediately following this era replicated the training mentality which saw two teachers, an apprentice and a master, working in isolation (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996). The trainee was responsible for observing and emulating (Bergan, 1992, p. 7) the examples demonstrated and was then expected to master the skill set required for job performance. At this point the former apprentice was sent off upon graduation often into isolated, or assumed to be isolated areas, to perpetuate the teacher training process. The before mentioned cyclical disenfranchisement within the teaching population was now updated to not only include relaying on best guess routines but now incorporated relaying on accepted professional characteristics.

Dependence on Proven Practice

Between 1945 and 1985 mastering and then surviving on age-old practices or tricks of the trade passed down from master teacher to apprentice teacher was the rite of passage in many preservice teacher education practices[6]. It would also seem that for many classroom teachers, and a great many cooperating teachers of this time, successful experience with school-aged students and acquiring "school knowledge" (Posner, 1993, p. 44) was equated with survival in the classroom. This sustained survival was then deemed as evidence of success as a professional educator.

Action researchers such as McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1999) concur with this observation and suggested that, for educators of this time period, "[g]ood professional practice emphasizes the action but does not always question the motives for the action (p. 8). The two worlds of campus-based teaching theory and site-based practicality, instead of mutually benefiting the other, often collided during the time period between 1945 - 1985. During this time the perceived rift between the theory of academic research

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[5] Practica are distinguished from field experiences in a number of ways, both subtle and more obvious. A detailed explanation of the two are included in Chapter Six, subsection entitled "Looking Past 'the Practicum'".

[6] Researchers Brooks & Sikes (1997) have postulated that the rite of passage mindset is still the mindset employed in many current teacher education programs in North America.

and the practices of the classroom became a chasm, with teachers not only de-valuing the importance of educational research in their work with students in schools but also feeling that their classroom-based 'craft' knowledge was not valued (Heibert, Gallimore & Stigler, 2002). This type of pragmatically based thinking was dangerous for it hindered the exploration of elevated professional practices in public school classrooms. Instead, the theory/practice rift manifested itself into a university-school divide, a divide that persisted within host schools as they accommodated student teachers. This university-school divide is what is meant by references to the theory-practice rift throughout this thesis.

Fletcher (2000), discusses the issue of elevated professional practice resulting from, which in turn leads to subsequent knowledge, when she cautions that "[i]n the survival stage it is tempting to offer quick-fix tips but this alone does not move the trainee to become a professional" (p. 9). This theory-practice polarization was unfortunate, for, to quote a phrase Lewin once coined nearly fifty years ago, "[n]othing is as practical as good theory" (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 19). According to many of the action research participants and cohort members, remnants of the quick-fix, survival mode of thinking persist today.

Nurturing Critically Reflective Practitioners (1985 - present)

In the mid 1980's a third era was initiated in pre-service teacher education which encouraged student teachers to emerge cognizant of the skills needed to be a critically reflective practitioner. According to Portner (1998), a reflective practitioner is a "teacher who thinks through the consequences of his or her plans and actions and makes modifications based on thoughtful consideration of outcomes" (p. 42). No longer just expected to simply plan educationally sound lessons and then act professionally, recent graduates of the Bachelors of Education program at the University of Alberta are expected to understand the importance of observing detailed examples of student learning and to reflect on what just occurred. While recently graduated novice teachers must demonstrate

the required knowledge, skills and attributes associated with being a competent educator[7], they are encouraged to be both uniquely individual within the profession and seek out additional knowledge with regards to education. Beauchamp and Parsons (1995) validate that this personal distinction of the individual who teaches is desirable:

> It is important to remember that teachers are people. It is also important to remember that people differ from one another. All in all, these differences are a very good thing. In teaching, too, differences are positive. Why, then, do we seem to have an idea that teachers should be clones of each other? (p. 21)

Tom (1997) further acknowledges this distinction between a technician and a profession who happens to teach. He also proposes that the reflective educator that emerges from current programming also be morally intuitive and inquisitive with regards to educational matters:

> Teachers emerging from these [undergraduate teacher education] programs must be prepared to enter into dialogue over the purposes of public [education]. This need suggests that ... programs must prepare morally sensitive and inquiry-oriented teachers, not classroom technicians. (p. 3)

While attempting to reconstruct the mentality of pre 1985 that observed recent graduates as clones, this reflective era was predicated on two distinct principles. The understanding that professionals should continue to seek opportunities for professional growth and that growth should come as educators explore the convergence of theory and practice within their own work.

Seeking Continual Professional Growth

The impeccable ideal of a finished person who teaches, and how they should look and behave upon culmination of their undergraduate education degree can be dangerous, for it may only consider form. According to constructivist learning theory (Walker & Lambert,

[7] In Canada teacher certification is a provincial matter. In Alberta, Alberta Learning dictates the desired knowledge, skill and attributes of recently graduated educators.

1995), "[a]ll individuals [in this case educators] have the potential to continually learn and grow" (p. 26). To create deeper understanding and further progressions within the teaching craft (Tom, 1987), individuals must be afforded the experiences that encourage and develop continual professional growth through communication and further understanding.

An example of this desire for the Faculty of Education (U of A) to promote critically reflective practitioners is highlighted in the cautionary words to undergraduates as they congregated together before their final field experience (APT). The then Assistant Dean responsible for field placement explained that they should view their education as a teacher as a lifelong process (Sande, October 4, 2000). He concluded his motivational and informative speech by stating, "a B.Ed means a good *beginning educator*. We think you are ready to start!" (Sande, October 4, 2000, speaker's emphasis). This message is consistent with the first principle of the new vision that has emerged from within the Faculty of Education (U of A) since the mid-1980's, which states, "[w]e felt that it was even more critical to prepare graduating teachers who were predisposed to become lifelong students of teaching" (Beauchamp, 1989, p. 26).

Examining the Theory/Practice Relationship

The second principle of the new model of preservice teacher education within the Faculty of Education (U of A) is the need for recent teaching graduates to continually examine the relationship between theory and practice in their lives as teachers. Since the implementation of university-based preservice programs, the two words, theory and practice, seem to have been dichotomously segregated by many in both the undergraduate student population as well as by the cooperating teachers with whom they work.

As discussed earlier, during the initial years immediately after the relocation of preservice teacher education in the university setting, the varsity program mirrored the Normal School format for field experience. The most noticeable difference between these two locations was that the field experience within the Faculty of Education (U of A) was

enveloped in an ever increasing theoretical component. The delegation of the *training*[8] of teachers to the academic institutions (Britzman, 1991, p. 28) did not automatically elevate the social standing of teachers in the community or the profession in society and may have actually led to a widening of the rift between theory and practice. Eisenhart, Belm & Romagnano (1991) examined this tension between theoretical understanding and classroom experience and discovered that it is often perpetuated by student teachers who "disregard the university as a source of information and teaching" (p. 66). Many times the situation has been experienced where prospective teachers, once immersed in the field experience, openly question why more of their "training"[9] cannot occur in school classrooms instead of on campus. As if preoccupied with the present they were/are unaware that theory is the rigour that sustains classroom reflective practice and advocates change towards improvement for our profession.

An argument could be made that many practicing teachers still perpetuate a creeping negativity towards university based educational research and its emphasis on theory. Hilty and Gitlin (1997) observed and speak to this negative notion of the rift between theory and practice within the professoriate being perpetuated with the comment, "for many [classroom] teachers, the most meaningful experience in teacher education was student teaching" (p. 106). Many members of the action research cohort observed that this negativity towards theory is further cultivated when former student teachers become qualified classroom teachers who find themselves in the role of cooperating teachers. Tom (1997) validates this sentiment by quoting a cooperating teacher as saying, "[m]ost of these courses had nothing to do with survival in the classroom. Many were taught by professors who had grand theories but little or no teaching experience"[10] (p. 50). Britzman (1991) concurs and provides support for the view that student teaching is valued heavily in the hearts and minds of both cooperating teachers and student teachers

[8] I stress the word training for it is this very notion that may widen the rift between theory and practice.

[9] Over the last three years I have had numerous conversations with student teachers who either return from their field experience or say during their field experience 'give us more stuff we can use' and/or, 'give us more time in the field!'.

[10] Please note, the intent of this quote is not to raise the issue of the credibility of the academic staff on campuses across western Canada. It is intended to highlight the rift between theory and practice.

when she explains the myth of experience:

> The myth that experience makes the teacher, and hence that experience is telling in and of itself, valorizes student teaching as the authentic moment in teacher education and the real ground of knowledge production (p. 7).

An argument could also be made that many existing classroom teachers could benefit from establishing links between the theoretical and the practical. Fullan & Connelly (1987) suggested that theory and practice must become interconnected in the minds of teachers. This call for interconnectedness of theory into the lives of teachers is supported by Tom (1997) who cautions that "[i]t would seem that prospective teachers need help in forging theory-practice links" (p. 141), for this merger has the potential that would allow emergent professionals not only to understand how to do something, but more importantly, the wisdom to reflect and explore why to do it in the first place.

The Current Pre-Service Teacher Education Program at the U of A

As a result of the societal pressures, (described above), and professional questions, (described above), in the mid 1980's the Faculty of Education (U of A) established a task force. This task force was struck to examine current pre-teacher education models at numerous academic institutions, with the goal of redefining the undergraduate teaching program then offered within the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. This final report, produced in 1987[11] and entitled Exploring and Mapping the Future (1989), precipitated a number of changes within the Faculty of Education. Among the report's final suggestions was the blending of two principles within preservice teacher education. The first was to nurture critically reflective recent graduates, who would then become practitioners within school environments and who could trigger change by questioning established practices. The second purpose was to encourage the persons responsible for instructing within undergraduate program, to put forth a concerted effort "[to] deal with student teachers' concerns and preconceptions about teaching" (Beauchamp, 1989, p. 23).

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[11] Still being distributed currently to entry level Masters' students interested in exploring concepts relating to preservice teaching within the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta.

The authors[12] of this two-year study addressed both these desired outcomes for the Faculty of Education's undergraduate programming -- reflective educators creating improvement opportunities while honouring concerns of the undergraduate population:

> Many teacher education models appear to be built on an integrative stance -- that is, they attempt to produce teachers who will fit comfortably into the current system. However, the basic assumption underlying our deliberations was that in addition to integrating prospective teachers into current systems, teacher education must also encourage future teachers to deal critically with their reality in order to improve it. (Beauchamp, 1989, p. 24)

The seamless integration of prospective teachers into classrooms -- so they may advocate further reflective practices within themselves and among their teaching peers -- is the program's overt goal. However, a major cause for anxiety raised by prospective teachers relates to finding and maintaining meaningful and permanent employment within a school jurisdiction of their choice upon completion of their degree. By respecting and then dealing with these legitimate undergraduate concerns, the Faculty of Education (U of A) planned to assist in migrating successful graduating preservice teachers into classrooms so that the profession would benefit.

Restructuring the Departments within the Faculty of Education

Within a few years of adopting these desired outcomes as a programming goal, the Faculty of Education (U of A) endured an era of cost cutting measures which saw a reduction of nearly 25% of its operating budget in the early 1990's (Beauchamp, 1998).

While still encouraged by the initial responses from undergraduate education students, classroom teachers and the professional organization (the ATA) the Faculty of Education was further bolstered by researchers in other settings who were exploring issues related to preservice teacher education. For example Britzman (1991) explained four critical aspects

[12] Included in this list are current administrators Larry Beauchamp (Dean), Terry Carson (Chair Secondary Education), Carolyn Yewchuk (Associate Dean) and Ken Ward (Collaborative Schools Originator).

that shaped teacher identity: 1) personal life, 2) University course work, 3) field experience and 4) first year of teaching experience.

The Faculty of Education focused its restrained resources on addressing the critical aspects (Britzman, 1991) it felt most suited or responsible for -- course work and field experiences -- and reconstituted its undergraduate program in a number of innovative, and cost efficient, ways. As such the Faculty of Education began to examine controlling enrollment, interdepartmental alignment and the need for Undergraduate Student Services.

Raising Entrance Requirements

The first and most noticeable reconstruction of the undergraduate program was to control enrollment which served to raise the entrance criteria for its student population. Currently the Faculty of Education has three distinct entrance routes. One route is to have prospective education students complete a qualifying "pre-professional" year consisting of 10 half year courses from outside of the Faculty of Education[13]. This form of program admission is commonly referred to as the '1 + 3' program and is responsible for approximately two-thirds of all education students. During this pre-professional year undergraduate education students can study entry level courses from numerous faculties or provincial colleges before applying to the Faculty of Education for the remaining 90 credits (three years of a four year degree).

The second route is offered to those prospective teachers who have completed a previous degree. This 'after degree' program requires students to engage in a program consisting of 20 classes (60 academic credits) which was intended to be completed within two academic years or four academic terms.

The third route which may lead to obtaining a Bachelor of Education degree is the option of completion a second degree simultaneously. By integrating similar courses or field

[13] With each course consisting of 39 instruction hours, each courses each receive a 'weight' of three credits. Therefore, prospective education students enter the program having earned a minimum of 24 credits.

experiences within each program the 'combined degree' program allows Education undergraduates the ability to completion, in five academic years, a second degree from the Faculties of Science, Arts, Physical Education and Recreation, Agriculture/Forestry and Home Economics, and the School of Native Studies while completing their Bachelor in Education[14].

Interdepartmental Alignment

The second reconstruction of the undergraduate program was the realignment of a number of departments. While this realignment was completed out of fiscal necessity some suggest it has lead to a more integrated program of delivery at the undergraduate education level. Departments such as Educational Administration, Educational Foundations, and Adult Career and Technology Education were either amalgamated, aligned or dissolved. With the goal of both saving money (during a period of profound government cutbacks) and maintaining the quality of educational experience for undergraduates, the current Faculty of Education has five administrative units operating within its program, those being the departments of Educational Psychology, Educational Policy Studies, Secondary Education, Elementary Education and the School of Library and Information Studies. An innovative, progressive approach to preservice teacher education programming was undertaken which observed each department taking responsibility for organizing specific components of the undergraduate program.

The Emergence of Undergraduate Student Services (USS)

To assist in understanding the context of undergraduate education within the Faculty of Education (U of A), specifically the field experience component of the program, it is imperative to discuss the contributions of a newly formed unit[15], named Undergraduate

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[14] It is important to note that no Education content or pedagogical courses are compromised in this program. All student who obtain a Bachelor of Education from the U of A experience the same core content in programming.

[15] As opposed to an academic department, Undergraduate Student Services does not have authority to offer courses, with the exception of EDFX 200.

Student Services (USS). Located in a high traffic area frequented by undergraduate students, personnel in this unit are not only responsible for admissions, records and helping undergraduate students sort through their academic requirements and program concerns, but are also charged with overseeing the field experience components of the undergraduate program *and* with assigning student teachers to host schools.

To aid in the streamlining of protocols, the administrators and office staff of USS must not only liaise continuously with various representatives from departments within the Faculty of Education (U of A) to organize and schedule upcoming field experience dates and expectations, but also correspond with surrounding school districts to arrange the placements of over 5000[16] students each year in and around the Edmonton area[17]. This requires several seasonal mail outs, countless phone calls, and numerous speaking engagements from the approximately ten people working within this office[18]. To assist in the dissemination of information and the successful recruitment of the appropriate number of cooperating teachers each term, the Associate Dean of this unit also confers regularly with representatives from the ATA and the numerous schools boards within the area. As such, this person is often considered to be the human face of the Faculty of Education or the voice on the other end of the phone, which many within the action research cohort felt was critical for a successful liaison between the host schools and the Faculty of Education.

Sequencing of Integrated Undergraduate Courses

When applying to the '1 + 3' the 'after degree' or the 'combined degree' route,

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[16] During the 2001/2002 academic year 5100 student teacher placements were arranged in the geographical area from Red Deer Alberta north.

[17] It should be mentioned at this time that the unit responsible for placing students in their field experience at the University of Alberta, Undergraduate Student Services, has a policy outlining placements of student teachers within host schools. It is policy to place a minimum of two student teachers, with preferably more, in each host school site for each of the above outlined field experiences. It is the feeling of the unit administrators and the ATA that this duality of students will not only combat isolationism of students working solo but also nurture communication between the student teachers with the goal of creating networks.

[18] This number is taken from the 2001/2002 academic school year.

undergraduate students are expected to specify either an Elementary (grades k - 6) or Secondary (grade 7 - 12) track. While completing their second full year of classes -- again consisting of primarily liberal arts and science based courses -- education undergraduates begin a progression through a series of sequenced professional courses, including a number of field experiences. The discourse within these discussions among the Faculty of Education (U of A) revolved around the desire to develop courses that would then "serve to bolster their [prospective teachers'] confidence and bring them to the point where they can reframe their thoughts based on their current knowledge about teaching" (Beauchamp, 1987, p. 31). With this scaffolding of knowledge and campus-based experience as a framework, the Faculty of Education (U of A) also examined the in-school component within its four year program and made some alterations, the most noticeable of which was the inter-connectedness of the campus-based courses to the host school experience. This recursive looping of both in-school and campus-based learning, Smits (2000), would then serve to promote critical thinking and empathic understanding within the graduate:

> Just as university portions of teacher education programs have come under intense scrutiny, there needs to be a continuing and deeper questioning about what ought to constitute good field experience in teacher education and to continue to attempt to think differently about practice. (p. 3)

While the 13 week length remained unchanged, the term practicum was dropped and replaced with the phrase field experience. While seemingly semantic to many uninformed cooperating teachers, this conscious change of terms signaled, that the Faculty of Education (U of A) wanted this component to not only look differently but to have students experience it differently[19]. It was expected that field experiences would then be orchestrated to provide the most auspicious learning involvement possible -- for both the student teacher and the cooperating teacher. In the next three subsections the phases of field experience which, at the time of this research, constituted the field experience component of the Bachelor's of Education degree at the University of Alberta are examined.

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[19] Many participants within this action research would suggest that this change in terminology only meant something to those in the Faculty of Education for the Faculty members were the only ones who actually know why the terms were modified.

Introduction to the Profession of Teaching (EDFX 200)

An example of field experience which promotes reflective practice occurred during the first field experience of many of the undergraduates, a course entitled Introduction to the Profession of Teaching (EDFX 200). At the time this research was completed, education undergraduate students in the 1 + 3 program, or students registered in faculties outside of education who wished to register in this course/field experience, had the opportunity to engage in ten weekly, half-day visits to two schools within the greater Edmonton area. With a goal of "providing students with an understanding of the scope of teaching and the expectations placed on teachers" (Handbook for the Elementary Field Experience for the Introductory Professional Term 1999 - 2000), these ten half-day observations were divided equally between secondary and elementary school settings in order to allow uncommitted undergraduate students the opportunity to decide whether pursuing an education degree was appropriate for them or to permit committed, but still uncertain, education students the opportunity to decide which educational programming route to choose[20]. Arranged through Undergraduate Student Services, this field experience carried a three credit course weighting and was scripted to pull together all undergraduates, regardless of elementary or secondary programming, together for weekly visits to both an elementary and secondary school, and also collectively back on campus for weekly discussion and observational meetings in cohort groupings of 25 to 30 members.

An interesting component of this particular course/field experience was that, whenever possible, an entire class of education students were placed in a cohort in first one, and then a second, host school, therefore making the establishment of a supportive cohort, more possible. While it was not always possible to accommodate the entire cohort into either the first or second host school site, every effort was made to ensure that students

[20] Unfortunately a large number of 'after degree' students chose, or were not able to accommodate this course into their already crowded timetable. As a result, a great many prospective teachers were moving into the remaining education program without this course, and therefore, without an opportunity to learn early in their program the intricacies of the profession from a classroom perspective. This was extremely problematic for the integration of knowledge in subsequent courses and field experiences and therefore, disconcerting to both the student population and the Faculty itself. As a result the course and field experience component were dropped at the beginning of the 2002 school year in favour of another programming choice which would afford all students a somewhat limited host school perspective. This shift also changes the ability to spend time in both Elementary and Secondary schools.

at this entry level move into schools organized into a familiar cadre of classmates from their section on campus. Usually eight, ten or 12 students went out at a time to a particular school. Cadre groupings were initiated for this course/field experience to encourage and promote collegial and professional conversations to emerge between teacher candidates. I see this as an attempt to create dialogue lanes within purposely created groupings of student teachers, which is what Tom (1997) has said, when he stated that, "we have largely ignored the social dimensions of teaching, in which candidates have relationships with one another and, ultimately, develop collective obligations to the overall profession" (p. 149). During the subsequent campus-based sessions individual and/or group observations were discussed with the goal of strengthening reflective practice.

Once this field experience was completed, '1 + 3' undergraduate education students had concluded the first of 14 weeks of in-school field experience placements. After degree students were not expected to complete this first field experience. Instead they proceed directly to the next stage of field experience program development, a four week field experience sandwiched between campus-based learning opportunities.

Introductory Professional Term (IPT)

A second example of the inter-connectedness between what constitutes good field experience (Smits, 2000) and campus-based learning opportunities is illustrated by the third year term, mandatory for all education students, entitled the Introductory Professional Term (IPT). The IPT is a specifically designed term comprised of five three credit weighted course sections which must be taken together, either before or after the Winter break. Four of the five modules are campus-based courses which commence at the start of the term and continue for six weeks, before each undergraduate student proceeds to host schools for a four week field experience.

- **OVERALL COURSE SCHEDULE**

6 Weeks On Campus (Sept 9 - Oct 22, 1999) (Jan 10-Feb 18, 2000)	Reading Week (Feb 21-25, 2000)	4 Weeks In School (Oct 25 - Nov 19, 1999) (Feb 28- Mar 24, 2000)	3 Weeks On Campus (Nov 22 - Dec 9, 1999) (Mar 27- Apr 14, 2000)
EDEL 300 *3 (6 hrs/week) Introduction to Teaching in the Elementary School		EDPY 329 *3 Elementary Route Field Experience for the Professional Term	
EDPS 310 *3 (3 hrs/wk) Managing the Learning Environment			EDPS 310 *3 (6 hrs/wk) Managing the Learning Environment
EDPY 301 *3 (3 hrs/wk) Inclusive Education			EDPY 301 *3 (6 hrs/wk) Inclusive Education
EDPY 303 *3 (4 hrs/wk) Educational Assessment			EDPY 303 *3 (4 hrs/wk) Educational Assessment

Figure 4: Introductory Professional Term -- Elementary Education

OVERALL COURSE SCHEDULE - 1999/2000

6 Weeks On Campus (Sept 9 - Oct 22, 1999) (Jan 10-Feb 18, 2000)	Reading Week (Feb 21-25, 2000)	4 Weeks In School (Oct 25 - Nov 19, 1999) (Feb 28- Mar 24, 2000)	3 Weeks On Campus (Nov 22 - Dec 9, 1999) (Mar 27- Apr 14, 2000)
EDSE MINORS *3 (6 hrs/week) Teaching Methods in the Minors		EDPY 329 *3 Secondary Route Field Experience for the Professional Term	
EDPS 310 *3 (3 hrs/wk) Managing the Learning Environment			EDPS 310 *3 (6 hrs/wk) Managing the Learning Environment
EDPY 301 *3 (3 hrs/wk) Inclusive Education			EDPY 301 *3 (6 hrs/wk) Inclusive Education
EDPY 303 *3 (4 hrs/wk) Educational Assessment			EDPY 303 *3 (4 hrs/wk) Educational Assessment

Figure 5: Introductory Professional Term -- Secondary Education

During this time on campus, prospective classroom teachers hear grade - specific theory, are exposed to methodology and techniques and are challenged to think of prospective classroom issues from a proactive stance by instructors from various departments within the Faculty of Education (U of A). As one can tell from the following schedule (see Figures' 4 & 5), with the exception of EDEL 300 (Introduction to Teaching in an Elementary School) and EDSE *Minors* sections, the course titles and programs are identical for all students, regardless of their program route.

Each IPT student teacher is responsible for instructing up to 50% of the cooperating teacher's assignment by the conclusion of the four-week field component. It may be possible, and indeed desirable[21], to have two student teachers assigned to a particular cooperating teacher. At the time of this research once this field placement component of the IPT is completed, the teacher candidates return to the university class and instructor for three weeks, to reflect on experiences and to gain further insight. This is true for all courses with the exception of the before mentioned EDSE Minors and EDEL 300 courses, all of which are front-ended to provide students with the most information and knowledge of skills and curriculum possible before entering the field experience.

An integral component of the IPT is the provision for a number of 'Friday Orientation Visits' which occur before the actual start dates of the four week field experience. At the time of this research these acclimation visits transpired two Fridays before the actual start date of the scheduled field experience. The dates of these Friday Orientation visits are listed in handbooks for both Elementary and Secondary Education students. The content and description is quite succinct, "[p]rior to their four-week field experience, student teachers will make two half-day orientation visits to their [host] school. These visits will take place on Friday morning" (p. 34). The handbook continues:

> One purpose of these visits is to familiarize student teachers with the school and community, and to acquaint them with the staff members and students with whom they will be working. A second purpose of the visit

[21] Desirable on the part of the Undergraduate Student Services administration of the program for cooperating teachers are traditionally scarce at this level of field experience.

> is to allow the school to learn more about each student teacher in order to facilitate optimal placements and field experiences. (Field Experience Handbook for Introductory Professional Term, 2000, p. 34)

As of September, 2002 the Introduction to the Profession of Teaching course (EDFX 200), including the Friday Orientation visits, have been replaced with a full week of host school visits and observations. This week, added to the Introductory Professional Term in the form of a full week of observation with a single school, allows the total length of time for field experiences in host schools to remain at 13 weeks.

Advanced Professional Term (APT)

Regardless of the entry method into the undergraduate program, each prospective teacher must exit the program having completed a nine-week field experience, part of what is referred to as the Advanced Professional Term (APT). During the APT, students receive placements from the USS unit in either their grade or division specific program route, if they are based in the Elementary program, or their major subject specialization, if they are based in a Secondary Education program. To assist undergraduates in preparing themselves for this content specific placement a number of campus based courses are attended in the weeks preceding the commencement of the placement, which occurs at the conclusion of the 13-week term.

Within this field experience student teachers are expected to acclimate quickly to both the classroom and school environment, with the goal of assuming 80% of the teaching load normally seen by their cooperating teacher in the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth weeks of the round. This is designed so that student teachers have the experience of planning, marking, completely teaching a unit of study and developing assessment tools as well as participating in a host of extra-curricular activities. During the ninth and final week of the field experience, it is expected that the cooperating teacher will begin to regain major responsibility in the classroom, allowing the student teacher to move throughout the school observing other classes, networking with other staff members or observing other student teachers.

Strengthening Professional Relationships

While the rationale for a thought provoking and dynamic field experience component is noble in its intent, initial discussion within the action research collective often focused on how host schools were still leery of the Faculty of Education's intentions. The implementation into host schools of this revised preservice teacher education program, has proven to be somewhat more problematic because of the perceived rift between theory and practice -- a rift that involves tensions arising between host schools and the Faculty of Education (U of A). Participants felt that, as teachers, they were only used for placements of students and their input, their personal and professional knowledge as teachers, was not really valued. By acknowledging the importance of the field experience component of its undergraduate program, the Faculty of Education (U of A) has also demonstrated a new mentality of acknowledging the important role cooperating teachers have within this component of the preservice teacher education program.

Mindful of elevated perception of cooperating teachers, and in order to access these classroom teacher skills as mentors on a regular basis, the Faculty of Education has also begun to look for ways to strengthen its cooperative arrangements with host schools. One way of strengthening these cooperative arrangements is to increase the opportunity for dialogue among those involved in the preservice teacher education process. To facilitate discussion about promoting continual professional growth (ATA, 2000; ATA, 1998) and the exploration of ways in which to bridge the theory/practice rift that would lead to the advancement of the teaching profession, a larger working relationship was undertaken between representatives from the Faculty of Education (U of A) and the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). In the final section of this chapter, the following three sub-sections -- collaborative partnerships with the Alberta Teachers' Association (1994 - present), the Collaborative School Initiative (1995 - present) and redefined roles, relationships, and responsibilities -- describe and explain how the Faculty of Education (U of A) and the ATA attempted to address critical issues related to preservice teacher education through consistent and sincere dialogue.

While this concept of a collaborative 'partnership' is prevalent in the literature (Husband, 1997; Portner, 1995; Tom, 1997; Yurick, 2000b), its definition is partly semantic and conceptual as well as political and personal. For many teachers who have consciously broken the isolationist mentality and experienced positive teaching affiliations, the term "partnership" implies equal exchange of ideas and a mutual reciprocity of energy. Beauchamp and Parsons (1995), assert that "teachers have described the ideal colleague as helpful, but not pushy" (p. 25). This sentiment of a supportive co-worker as critical friend (Beauchamp & Parsons, 1995) was echoed by many of the action research cohort, who would state that partners need to be sincere, honest and open to suggestions -- for teaching partners share students, ideas and responsibilities and, occasionally, working environments.

However, despite the assuredness of equality while discussing partnership at a personal level, academic pluralism abounds regarding the direction that helpful partnerships should take with regards to pre-service teacher education programming at the institutional level. Husbands (1997) states, "[t]he degree of 'partnership,' and the extent to which effective responsibility for teacher education has moved from higher education to [host] schools, varies considerably" (p. 13). This acknowledgement and subsequent empowerment of site-based teachers in the education of preservice teacher candidates is validated by such researchers as Hilty and Gitlin (1997), who, state that "there needs to be more collaboration between teacher educators and practitioners in the school" (p. 107).

While some would argue that providing leadership in this regard is not the mandate of either the Faculty of Education (U of A) or the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), educational researchers Brooks and Sikes (1997) note that "higher education institutions (HEI) and schools have been developing closer training partnerships for much of the second half of this century"[22] (p. 16). The challenge within this trend is to create a vehicle

[22] While this researcher does have difficulty positioning Brooks and Sikes' use of the word "training" in relation to the establishment of partnerships between school sites and university facilities, it is appreciated that a great deal of effort and resources have been expended in developing such partnerships.

for implementing change where the "not pushy" (Beauchamp & Parsons, 1995, p. 25) partners provide needed resources and timely information to each other. This approach to preservice teacher education partnership reform within the north central Alberta region is consistent with the ideas put forth by educational researcher Tom:

> Developing a teacher education program is a *social process* in which individuals need to develop shared perspectives and to articulate their teaching efforts with colleagues, all within the context of educational institutions. (Tom, in Valli, 1992, p. ix, emphasis added)

Just as partnership is contingent on collaboration, collaboration requires both communication and relationship building. One leadership initiative that has received much attention from other Faculties of Education and professional associations across western Canada is the CSI.

Collaborative Schools Initiative (1995 - present)

The second way in which the Faculty of Education and the ATA attempted to address the issues related to the critically important role of field experience within the undergraduate program was first articulated within conversations between Larry Booi, now provincial president of the ATA, and the then Assistant Dean of Field Experience (U of A) Dr. Gordon McIntosh, during a conference in 1994. This dialogue concentrated on the idea of a shared perspective of partnership and proposed a collaborative field experience endeavour with the following:

> 1) a teacher in each school who would volunteer to coordinate the field experience program in the school
>
> 2) ... an orientation towards providing "Whole School Experiences" for the student teachers
>
> 3) cooperating teachers honoraria would be paid into a professional development account established at the school. (Barry et al, 1998, p. 52).

Figure 6: Collaborative Field Experience Endeavour - Three Key Components

The Booi/Macintosh conception garnered support and, guided by current literature and supplemented with local research regarding the reconceptualization and reorganization of the field experience component of preservice teacher education (Yurick, 2000a), a steering committee was organized with the aim of improving the partnerships among various stakeholders involved in field experiences[23]. This committee, referred to as the Edmonton Area Field Experience Committee (EAFEC) commenced meeting in 1995, with representation from the Faculty of Education (U of A), Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) and approximately 12 teachers representing the numerous school boards[24] within the University of Alberta field experience placement area. Meetings hosted at the head office of the ATA five times throughout the academic year. As the 1999 - 2000 Field Experience Annual report (Dean & Sande, 2000) stated,

> The Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, and The Alberta Teachers' Association are committed to a teacher education program and a professional working relationship that promotes collegial, collaborative, reflective relationships and practices. (appen. A)

This mutual responsibility to collegial relationships amongst field experience stakeholders (Corrigan & Haberman, 1990) has manifested itself in the creation of somewhat ambiguous guidelines, which have remained constant since the CSI's inception,

[23] It should also be noted that the field experience length was not a discussion issue during the initial meetings and overall field experience length has remained consistent from the period before the initiation of the CSI.

[24] There were two from each level, at the elementary, junior and senior high.

1) to promote collegial models for field experience, using the whole school setting;

2) to provide opportunities for increased collaboration between the participants in the field experience program resulting in more deliberation and review, reflection, observation of alternative practices and feedback and support;

3) to explore ways of enhancing the provision for professional development experiences for teachers with support from the Faculty of Education;

4) to consider alternative forms of compensation and/or recognition of teachers involved in the field experience program;

5) to refine roles (eg., university facilitator and school coordinator) and other conditions essential to implementing the collegial model.

Figure 7: Collaborative Schools Initiative Guidelines

To heighten these collegial relationships, an organizational protocol was also established to ensure timely attention to issues raised at the meetings. The week following the EAFEC meetings, five "executive members" of EAFEC travel to the University of Alberta campus to address the newly raised items of concern with the Associate Dean of Field Experiences and the various field experience coordinators from the multiple departments within the Faculty of Education. During these meetings, referred to as the Field Experience Policy Advisory Committee (FEPAC), a number of issues are continually raised for discussion, three of which will be explored in the next subsections of this chapter. These issues include the unexpected success and unchecked growth of the CSI endeavour, the distinction between field experience and practicum, and the opportunity for host school renewal by adopting many of the CSI's ideals.

Unexpected Success -- Unchecked Growth

The first issue that regularly received attention within the action research cohort, as well as at both the EAFEC and FEPAC meetings, was the unexpected success of the Collaborative School Initiative program among host schools within the Edmonton area. This growth, at times unchecked, increased the number of host schools involved in the

CSI from six pilot host schools at its inception in 1995 to more than 80 schools (Armstrong et al, 1999, p. 235) in the fall of 1998. At the conclusion of the 2000 - 2001 school year the number of host schools which embraced some or all of the characteristics of the CSI had grown to more than 130.

Encouraged by the positive response to the CSI goals, in the fall of 1999 Undergraduate Student Services, in consultation with EAFEC, decided that the field experience literature once generated exclusively for the Collaborative Initiative Schools become standard print material for all host schools. This decision was intended to make these philosophies and procedures the norm rather than the exception (Wimmer, 1999). Unfortunately, while the literature each host school receives is consistent with the CSI's goals and ambitions, because each school chooses to become part of the 'Initiative', many within the action research cohort felt the onus was left to the host school staff to develop a field experience program that worked for its particular needs. While referring to the lack of information afforded to her in her role as school coordinator, one cohort member, Sherry, lamented "[i]t is really hard to work in a vacuum!!" (Sherry, April 12, 2000).

While honouring the uniqueness of host schools is critical because "each school has its own history" (Beauchamp & Parsons, 1992, p. 127), it is also problematic in that many times field experience programming replicates the experiences of the person responsible for the planning. Quite simply, it is difficult to program for changes when these changes have not been experienced or observed by the person doing the planning.. One cohort member, Marlene, supported this observation and lamented the lack of direction provided to cooperating teachers within host schools as they undertook the CSI:

> There has to be some defining format that is common to all of them, which we are not seeing. Like some of them are Collaborative Schools Initiative only in name but they don't do any of the stuff and others are doing wonderful things and are not Collaborative Schools Initiative, (Marlene, March 13, 2001)

Distinguishing between Field Experience and Practicum

The second issue raised regularly within both the action research cohort sessions and the EAFEC and FEPAC was the need for cooperating teachers and, perhaps, entire host school teaching populations to migrate away from the notion of practicum and view working with student teachers within a host school as an opportunity for professional development. This alteration in pedagogical understanding is only possible when school personnel began to delineate between field experiences afforded to student teachers -- which have a host of characteristics including learning with the novice teacher and allowing that novice a whole school experience -- and practicum, which in its simplest form is practice teaching.

One defining alteration within the CSI format is the effort to jettison the antiquated notion of practicum in the minds of cooperating teachers and school coordinators and to promote a curricula of numerous field experiences for both student teachers and cooperating teachers while the student teachers are in host schools. As Joe Norris, a Faulty of Education (U of A) guest speaker to one of the discussion sessions proposed, "practicum implies learning from a master, whereas field experience is more than the doing of practice teaching" (Norris, October 5, 2000). In their co-written graduate course term paper, cohort members Beth and Lynn explored issues related to alternative views of field experience when they articulated:

> No longer can field experience programs isolate student teachers in single classrooms if they are to conceptualize the diverse and comprehensive roles of teachers. Typically the practice [of training a student teacher] is to place one student with one cooperating teacher in a single classroom, gradually taking on the responsibility of presenting more and more lessons to the whole class. (Arnold & Robinson, 2000, p. 5)

Host School Renewal

A third issue raised with the action research cohort and the ATA/U of A discussions was the foreseen benefits within schools who subscribed to the CSI model. By implementing

the Collaborative School Initiative, perhaps its founders felt that not only would preservice teachers receive a heightened educational experience through the opportunity to become involved in a field experience within host schools, but staff members within the same school may also experience professional renewal. This renewal of the teaching faculty was facilitated in large part by both the presence of teacher candidates and the accompanying Faculty of Education (U of A) representation. Tom (1997), quoting Goodlad, also recommends

> the creation of school-university partnerships, including the development of partner or professional development schools, and he further argues for "the absolute necessity for the renewal of schools and the education of those who work in them to proceed simultaneously" [p. 193] (p. 63)

Fletcher (2000) has also observed that, "[t]he teaching profession is just beginning to see the potential that mentoring[25] holds for improving schools and raising standards in classrooms ..." (p. 57). To enable this potential energizing of both of the host school and individual classroom environments through the process of mentoring teacher candidates, new roles and responsibilities needed to be introduced and outlined.

Redefined Roles, Relationships or Responsibilities

While the "concerns based" and "reflective practice" (Beauchamp, 1989, p. 23) approaches to the undergraduate program undertaken by the Faculty of Education (U of A) served to elevate the professional practice of the undergraduate population, the Faculty and the ATA, together, have also attempted to address, through the work of the CSI, the mistrust voiced from those cooperating teachers and school coordinators also involved in the process. As a result of this continuous dialogue within various committees, at both the campus and professional organization level, a tremendous amount of role reconstitution, both subtle and obvious, was undertaken within the CSI endeavor. While many of the responsibilities are equivalent or have similar titles, each also has important differences that need to be highlighted. In the next subsections, the

[25] In this case mentoring is referred to as coaching preservice teachers during their field experiences.

assignments or responsibilities of the cooperating teacher and student teacher, the school coordinator and the university facilitator are discussed.

Cooperating Teacher – Student Teacher Rapport

If it is true that "teachers possess the power to create conditions that help students learn a great deal -- or keep them from learning much at all" (Palmer, 1998, p. 6), then it could also be argued that cooperating teachers have the capacity to create conditions to help prospective teachers continue to learn in the host school environment. The rapport between the mentor and the protégé are what some administrators responsible for the CSI may have been alluding to when they stated that

> the core component of preservice teacher education ... high quality supervision is recognized as essential to building linkages between on-campus components of pre-service teacher education programs and the experience of student teachers in their placements. (Maynes, McIntosh & Wimmer, 1998)

To help ensure high quality supervision the CSI model has proposed a number of "significant recommendations" (CSI:School Coordinators Manual, 1997-1998, p. 2) regarding both these roles. To examine these expectations we must explore the ideological keystones of the Collaborative School Initiatives which shifts the site-based component of preservice teacher education "away from the 'apprenticeship model' of teacher training" (CSI:School Coordinators Manual, 1997-1998, p. 2) towards an ideal that values and respects both participants as being involved in a learning process. While the role may be referred to as a cooperating teacher, I prefer cooperating mentor teacher[26], for the term mentor truly captures the intentions that I would like to propose, which are, 1) a simultaneous acquisition of further proficiency, and 2) a shared responsibility in the development of a common professional body of knowledge. However, if I were to use just mentor, the intended audience of this document may miss the essence of the message,

[26] A cooperating mentor teacher is one who mentors the pre–service student teacher during the field experience. He or she works collaboratively with the other staff members, the field experience school coordinator and the university facilitator during the field experience (Keanie, 2001, p. 58).

for the current vernacular is understood as cooperating teacher.

In researching these tenets I immediately thought of my final field experience, conducted in the spring of 1986. It was during this field experience that I accomplished a subtle, yet profound, shift away from the desire to be a nurturer of children to answering the calling of being an educator as well as a caregiver by not being reduced to imitating the host teacher despite my lack of a "constructed pedagogical view of teaching" (Tom, 1997, p. 140). I completed my final field experience in a classroom which emphasized that the teacher's role was not to direct but rather to facilitate learning (Posner, 1993). In this classroom the "process" involved in learning, both mine and that of the young children, took precedence over the final "product" (Blakey, 1985). Palmer (1998), would later support this observation by advocating that "good education is always more process than product" (p. 94).

It was here in this type of learning environment that I finally felt that I, too, could teach. With open student teacher - cooperating teacher dialogues and discussions, I believed we implemented meaningful activities based not only on the learning needs of the students but on mine as well. Not only were the students valued for their contributions, but mine were honoured as well. The culture of the classroom and the entire school, as I would determine later as I freely observed other teachers, supported learning for both the students and adults (Walker & Lambert, 1995, p. 15). In this caring community of learners (Sergiovanni, 1994), both individual and collective growth was expected and respected, as were the processes for achieving that growth (Walker & Lambert, 1995, p. 15). While a compassionate, collaborative, cooperating teacher demonstrated these philosophies in her interactions with her students and her peers, she also allowed me to learn how it felt to become a teacher. The self doubts of my less than successful previous field experience were dissolved in this relationship with her, replaced instead with courage to implement my vision of teaching.

It was also during this final, albeit supplemental, field experience that a link was fused between my cooperating teacher and me that remains to this day. I still dialogue with

Robin Preece and have only recently discovered that I was her first student teacher. According to Robin, her practice of mentoring student teachers, as well as her overall classroom teaching, was impacted and subsequently improved by my presence as a protégé in her room and the insightful reflection I encouraged within her (Robin Preece, June 1999)[27]. This notion of symbiotic improvement of classroom competencies is succinctly illustrated by Garvey (2001, p. 7) of the Alberta Teachers' Association in the following illustrations, as he charts the professional growth and development of both stakeholders, the protégé and the mentor, in relationship with each other.

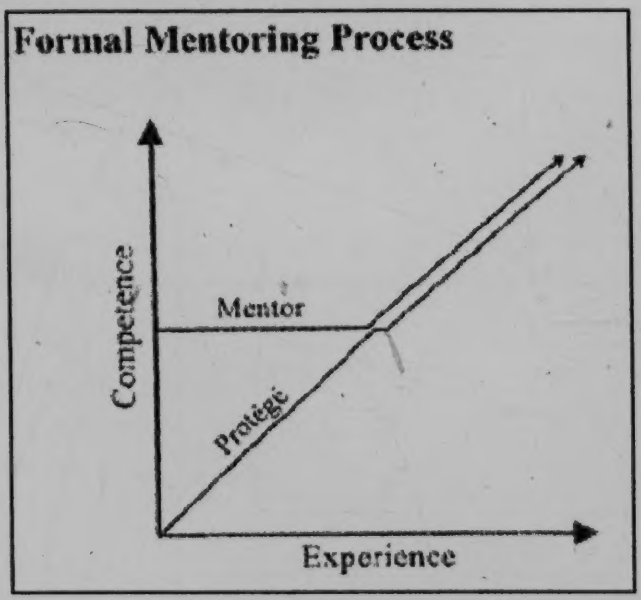

Figure 8: Formal Mentoring Progress - D. Garvey (2001)

With this visual as a stimulus, I will refer to cooperating teachers simply as mentors during the remainder of this document, for according to researchers such as Fletcher (2000), "mentors simultaneously empower and enhance practice" (p. 1) not only for their protégé, but for themselves as well. It is also for these reasons that I refer to Robin's role as that of mentor, as opposed to solely being a cooperating teacher, for she defied the commonly held belief at the time that relationships between student teachers and cooperating teachers dictate that the student teacher *comply* with the demands of their performance evaluators (Beynon & Onslow, 1992). During this time that pre-dated the implementation of the CSI my "cooperating mentor teacher" (Keanie, 2001), Robin, fostered the notion that teaching was a "humane profession" (Norris, 1995, p. 61) and

[27] Thank you, Robin for the tremendous compliment. I hope my work with student teachers is a reflection of the care and concern you expressed for me.

also dismantled the traditional "apprenticeship style" of relationship between the student teacher and cooperating teacher, in which, the prospective teacher was "expected to maintain existing patterns and styles of teaching and not upset the status quo" (Arnold & Robinson, 2000, p. 5). With Robin I did not experience the situation in which, according to Britzman (1991), "becoming a teacher may mean becoming a person you're not" (p. 4). Instead, I was allowed and encouraged to bring into the classroom the person I was and to comment on and question events that occurred. Fletcher (2000) would concur with this notion of humanness within the profession and suggested that "mentoring is concerned with continuing personal as well as professional development and not just continuing professional development" (p. 1). The facilitation of this understanding is discussed by Greenwood & Levin (1998) when they state

> [k]nowledge is not imparted simply through the passage of concepts from a [cooperating] teacher to a student [teacher], but rather through the interactions between them and their collaborative efforts to solve certain problems together through their actions. (p. 102)

Under Robin's tutelage I felt it was acceptable to ask questions of her classroom practice in order to not "become [a] passive imitator of the cooperating teacher" (Arnold & Robinson, 2000, p. 5). Instead we established a mutually respectful communicative dwelling place, which, despite our extremely divergent backgrounds and experiences, allowed for meaningful discourse to flow back and forth. By asking questions about her practice I also started the process of asking questions of mine. These unobstructed dialogue lines convinced me of my capabilities through pertinent questions, appropriate coercion and calibrated independence. With Robin's mentoring I did not feel the onerous pressure to "have it all completed" (Norris, 1995, p. 61) in order to pass "the test" at the end of the practicum. Instead, with Robin's encouragement and masterful coaching, I explored the complexities of learning and teaching. Demanding questions were asked of me, and I was permitted, perhaps eventually expected, to ask probing questions of myself, of my mentor and of the profession itself.

During this field experience I was also afforded the tremendous opportunity of observing my cooperating mentor teacher model collaboration within previously established

networks of school personnel. These surveillances were made in two respects: the first during 'internal' staff meetings within the host school itself and the second during 'external' teacher meetings -- gatherings of a long established teacher supper group from various sites throughout Edmonton and area. In both instances educators seemed to engage easily in dialogue as they co-planned and implemented their units of study. During the internal host school discussions, it became apparent that many educators were not only comfortable expressing their professional concerns for both public education and the learning experiences of individual students, they were also committed to establishing or maintaining a professional community that acknowledges the profound importance of learning while teaching. Sergiovanni (1994) explains this form of fellowship as "[p]rofessional communities where members make a commitment to the continuous development of their expertise and to the ideals of professional virtue" (p. 71).

The after-school or after-dinner sessions held every few weeks at multiple sites throughout the city proved to have a different timbre than the school-based meetings. Perhaps I was detecting the comfort of the long established relationships for those within the cohort. My cooperating mentor teacher recognized her need for, and more importantly modeled, the synergy of theory and practice, of research and pragmatic and of professional and personal in her work. Instead the degree of honest conversation at these out-of-school meetings regarding classroom concerns and professional growth was awe inspiring to a professionally impressionable preservice teacher. Being party to the benefits of this dialogue allowed me to partake in the prosperity of partnership, the rewards of teaming and the advantages of collaboration.

During these discussions it became apparent that all educators present were not only comfortable expressing their professional concerns for education, they were also committed to establishing and maintaining both a learning and a professional community that acknowledged the profoundly personal nature of teaching. Sergiovanni (1994) explains this form of community, "[l]earning communities where members are committed to thinking, growing and inquiring and where learning is for everyone an attitude as well as an activity, a way of life as well as a process" (p. 71).

With the intent of having group members discuss their classroom observation in light of district and provincial expectations, an interesting component of these sessions was the importance placed on current research and its supporting literature as well as practical classroom problem solving. Often group members would leave the sessions with research articles or timely print information other members had discovered, photocopied and distributed for everyone's benefit.

This final field experience was also my first hint of professional respect being afforded to me as a prospective teacher. In the years preceding the CSI my cooperating "mentor" teacher validated me as an informed authority, allowing me to bring my strengths, including my previously acquired personal and professional knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996b) to the entire school and eventually the profession itself. In addition to being granted inside master keys to the entire host school site and permission to venture in and out of other teachers' classrooms, I would often instruct my assigned grade three homeroom, then repeat the same lesson to an additional class within the school or I would be asked to teach the same concept to a different grade. While this was tremendously gratifying to have other classroom practitioners invite me into their classrooms to observe and potentially learn from me, it was also professionally beneficial to either observe or instruct different classes and/or grades levels. It was also advantageous to have other classroom teachers provide feedback to me that afforded a different perspective. All of these situations allowed me to create relationships with multiple members of the staff and, well as, view myself as a contributing member of the total learning community.

School Coordinator -- Assumed Leadership Role

The second role that needs to be highlighted within the CSI is the newly defined role of School Coordinator. Many school boards, particularly in the geographical area surrounding the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta, are now required to have site-based management and some are coaching their prospective and current administrators to practice Facilitative Leadership (Lambert et al, 1995; Larocque & Downie, 1994; Senge, 1990; Wheatley, 1992; Young, 1998) with their teaching staffs and school personnel. Facilitative leadership attempts to redress the concern that "traditional

schools have not promoted shared leadership with teachers" (Walker & Lambert, 1995, p. 10) by empowering the classroom teacher to be a change agent within the school setting. The CSI encourages a teacher at each host school to step forward, if they so choose, to "assume the role as the school coordinator for field experiences" with the goal of creating a, "rich and rewarding experience for both student teachers and school staff" (CSI: School Coordinators Manual, 1997 - 1998, p. 2).

The Faculty of Education (U of A), and more specifically Undergraduate Student Services, may have increased its impact on teacher professional growth and education by allowing interested people to become School Coordinators. However, assuming the role of change agent and providing rich and rewarding experience for a group of either current or potential educators with divergent wants and needs can place school coordinators in a difficult position. To understand the role of the School Coordinator, I examined the text within each of these areas with the help of Lynn's testimonials:

> When I look at my role [as school coordinator], I think you can look at it in five specific areas: communication, planning, problem solving, evaluation[28] and working with the University Facilitator. (Lynn, Feb. 22, 2001)

When discussing the profound importance of communication, Armstrong et al (1999, p. 241) stress that, "[c]ommunication is at the heart of the role of the school coordinator." Accordingly a tremendous amount of dialogue within the action research cohort was generated with respect to exchanging ideas, information and knowledge between student teachers and cooperating teachers but also in regards to the new ideals of field experiences with all staff members, those new ideals being that student teachers need not be considered a liability within the school. Instead their presence within the school can foster more than fresh ideas from the university, they can bring energy, personality and bloom into the classroom (O. Bilash, personal communication, July, 2002). These novice professionals have the potential to allow seasoned teachers and other school staff the opportunity to grow through critical self reflection (O. Bilash, personal communication,

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[28] It is important to note that the first four responsibilities cited by this participant were directly from the School Coordinators Manual, originally printed in 1997-1998 (p.8).

July, 2002). As will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this document, the establishment of an open and sincere communication conduit with all staff members was deemed critically important for the success of the CSI in host schools.

Of equal importance were the concerns raised within the action research cohort for placing student teachers with existing host school staff members. Former Field Experience Associate[29] and a CSI founder Yurick (2000a) verified, "[t]he critical nature of the role of the School Coordinator is orchestrating a successful whole-school experience..." (p. 8). The whole school experience, according to the Undergraduate Student Services document prepared for prospective student teachers

> allows the student teacher and school staffs to extend the field experience beyond the walls of the individual classroom. A whole school experience, facilitated by a school-based coordinator, provides an enriched field experience for student teachers .... and .... enables the school staff to interact with the university staff in a variety of professional ways. (Field Experience Handbook for Introductory Professional Term, 2000, p. 7)

The whole school experience was intended, therefore, to give student teachers the opportunity to move out of the isolationist relationship with the cooperating teachers and into the staffroom and social milieu of the entire host school, where dialogue among and between non-cooperating teaching personnel might be included. This movement towards extending field experience to the entire host school site is supported by numerous author/researchers such as Zeichner and Gore (1995), who observe, "[a]s we began to look at whole schools rather than individual classrooms as sites for student teaching (Zeichner, 1992b), we have started to think about the need to broaden the learning community for student teachers beyond what exists" (p. 28).

This notion of entire school exposure to prospective teachers is also supported by McNally, Cope, Inglis & Stronach (1997) as they provide support for the use of the

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[29] At the time the seconded position was referred to as a Practicum Associate.

> staffroom was a setting for most students [i.e. student teachers], in which they became part of the school. ... It was generally a relaxing environment in which they heard individual stories and children and classes, but where they developed a feeling of "the whole current running through the school" where they seemed to absorb the ethos of the school, and to be absorbed into the culture of the school. (p. 494)

My concern, and a stress that was later expressed by numerous members of the action research cohort, is that by promoting the whole school experience, differing expectations have led to additional workplace stresses being placed on the personnel within the host school. Teachers, and many of the action research cohort members, who are continually being buffeted by societal expectations or overly demanding expectations, will attest to the stresses dealt with daily in their classroom and schools. By being called upon to plan and provide for enriched experience for student teachers within the whole school, well meaning and professionally sincere School Coordinators and their staff have been asked to plan for events they know little about or have been asked to carry the burden of one more job during their work day.

By allowing the entire site, and as many teachers as possible, to adapt to the CSI program, it was hoped that more host schools and the stakeholders within the schools would buy in to the change, and experience teacher growth and renewal. Using this component of the initiative, "a school can integrate experiences into the culture of the school in ways that make sense for the particular school" (Armstrong et al, 1998, p. 247). Quality preservice teacher education, the Faculty of Education (U of A) has discovered, can take many forms. Undergraduate Student Services, instead of insisting on uniformity within its host schools, acknowledges the diversity of schools, and has chosen to celebrate this fact. While standardized recommendations within host schools are still expected, the individuality of each site is also acknowledged.

In the words of cohort members Beth and Lynn, both experienced and highly regarded school coordinators, "the role of trouble shooter or problem solver is inevitable when dealing with a number of stake-holders" (Arnold & Robinson, 2000, p. 10). Another cohort participant, when explaining her in-school role within the field experience, stated

> one of my jobs is to look after the student teachers. So when they come to the school I do the orientation and I'm sort of the liaison between them and the University and them and their cooperating teacher and so on (S.S. Nov. 14, 1999).

Clearly the tone within the dialogue circle around and across the table among participants was that student teachers are at a disadvantage at times and need protection. Perhaps this is because of the feelings of vulnerability expressed by the vast majority of the participants in the first cohort. At this point in the discussion it may be helpful to delineate the problem solving into concerns. Within this segment the school coordinator should be cognizant of two important evaluative roles, both of which figured predominately in the participant discussions. The first role is one of providing an ongoing evaluation of the field experience program itself within the host school. By continually looking for opportunities for the professional enhancement of all participants, a school coordinator begins to fulfill the "change agent" mandate advocated earlier in this chapter within the host school.

Regardless of the type of whole school experience both student teachers and host school staffs have been part of, a huge component of a teacher candidate's overall field experience anxiety continues to revolve around the area of assessment and performance evaluation. The second component of the evaluation role of the school coordinator is the area of selecting which student teacher assessment model should be employed to provide the ongoing individual professional development expected for all classroom teachers within the province of Alberta[30]. If we want to encourage undergraduate prospective teachers to reflect instinctively on their practice, and have the ambition to do so, then the profession must provide them with models on which they will pattern their professional behaviour. Unfortunately the existing field experience component in many host schools, according to the members of the action research collective, does not hold this pedagogy underpinning in high esteem. Instead the training mentality still holds firm in the mind of many cooperating teachers. To migrate away from student teachers simply emulating

[30] Teacher Professional Growth Plans, The Alberta Teachers' Association [booklet] (1998, 09, 21)

their cooperating teachers' classroom performance in front of students, the profession must create a place where cooperating teachers can ask questions about their new role as coach and learning facilitator. Perhaps Marlene provided the most succinct summary of the dual evaluative nature of the School Coordinator's role when she stated that the, "School Coordinators should provide evaluation of the school experience and assist with student teachers' assessments" (Keanie, 2001, p. 3).

University Facilitator – Non-Evaluative Advocate

The third pivotal component of the Collaborative School Initiative is the radically revamped non- evaluative role of the University Facilitator. While these persons, the majority of whom are retired educators with years of education administration or classroom experience, are still expected to "view themselves as representing the Faculty [of Education, U of A] when they are in schools" (Maynes, McIntosh & Wimmer, 1998), they are now in the schools to serve as both a non-judgmental supportive advocate of the student teacher as well as a sounding board for cooperating teachers. As such, they carry the responsibility of increasing the dialogue and collaboration between the key participants in the host schools which they supervise[31] and the Faculty of Education (U of A).

This removal of the assessment and reporting factor has, according to many current University Facilitators, allowed for reduction in the tension created by their presence in the classroom and schools. By acknowledging the importance of the person who holds this redefined role, the action research participants drew attention to the collegiality needed to shift from the "training" mentality of the preparation for student teachers towards a more inclusive "collegial model for field experience" (CSI: School Coordinators Manuel, 1997-1998, p. 2). In the words of the Professional Officer for Undergraduate Student Services

[31] It is interesting to note that many current University Facilitators have requested to be associated with the same "family of schools over a number of years" (Maynes, McIntosh & Wimmer, 1998). This is high praise for the relationship, commitment and communication developed between involved participants.

> [we have] changed the role of our University Facilitators from one in which their major responsibility was to provide feedback to, and evaluate the performance of, student teachers to one in which their key responsibility is to communicate with school coordinators and cooperating teachers so as to facilitate the best possible field experience programs for students (including the provision of whole school experiences). (Armstrong et al, 1999, p. 246)

With the implementation of the Collaborative School Initiative model throughout host schools within the north central Alberta area, the Faculty of Education (U of A) and the ATA have presumed that classroom teachers who assume the role of cooperating teacher would have rethought their role as mentors for student teachers and created a revised role for themselves in the process. However, as Posner (1993) cautions, "anyone who has tried to persuade a group of teachers to implement a particular change to curriculum has remarked on the degree to which teachers *adapt* rather than *adopt* curricula" (p. 23). Educational change is often difficult and onerous to facilitate, for the creation of the optimal conditions for learning about teaching is compounded (some would suggest confounded) with old information. As a result previously established models migrate very slowly in public education and perceived unilateral decisions regarding teacher education have not succeeded in the past because the teachers responsible for implementing the new program chose to either ignore or sabotage the content.

The problem of changing roles is also compounded by a profound lack of information emanating out towards cooperating teachers from the Faculty of Education (U of A). Fullan and Connelly (1997) draw attention to the fact that "the role of associate teachers is poorly defined and they feel unprepared for their supervisory responsibilities and they seek more input into the planning process" (p. 350).

While this promotion and popularity of partnerships between Collaborative Initiative Schools and stakeholders from both the Faculty of Education and the ATA could, and should, be an indicator of the CSI success, it can also be viewed as problematic. This point is mentioned for it is one of the premises of this research -- that the dissemination

of timely and appropriate information to host school personnel within the Collaborative Schools continues to be a concern not only for those who work in host schools, but also (as I would learn from working on campus for three years) from those within Undergraduate Student Services.

Chapter Synopsis

In this chapter an overview of both the historical regional and current local preservice teacher education programming was examined. In the next chapter the process of initiating the action research process will be detailed. Included within this discussion will be the detailed account of soliciting cohort members as well as particular discoveries from each cycle of the action research process.

CHAPTER 4:

SITUATING THE RESEARCH

According to Zeichner's (1983) personalistic paradigm, pre-service teacher education is a process of "becoming" rather than merely a product-based approach geared towards training someone to teach. Although written for the classroom educator, the same process of becoming applies to both a cooperating "mentor" teacher (Keanie, 2001) or school coordinator, or for that matter, my most current role as an educational researcher. For the enchanting evolution of "becoming" to occur within me, a safe place needed to be established -- a place where I granted myself the freedom to make mistakes and grow into action research. A huge component of this professional growth revolves around the ability to ask questions and then seek answers. The freedom to exploit this inquisitive opportunity was very important as I chose a research orientation. Action research, therefore, was chosen for it seemed to encapsulate all the qualities sought in my work mentoring student teachers. By engaging those involved in personalized meaning making (Lambert, 1995, p. 34), creating an awareness for self-reflective and intelligent action (Morgan, 1997 p. 92) and attempting to bridge the theory-practice rift, action research also aligned itself with the goals and philosophies of the CSI.

This research, therefore, became an attempt to demonstrate, or in some cases reestablish, cordial relationships between the primary spheres of influence (Carney & Hodysh, 1994; Corrigan & Haberman, 1990) critical for the success of preservice teacher education offered by the Faculty of Education (U of A), these being the mentors[1] in host schools and the campus staff members responsible for making decisions regarding student teaching programming. This chapter, therefore, is a recapitulation of information gained, testimonials shared and knowledge acquired by a cohort group membership while facilitating an action research project over a two-and-a-half year period[2]. It, hopefully, may be used by other practitioner researchers as a testimony to the power of action

[1] The terms *mentor* and *cooperating teacher* will be used interchangeably in the remainder of this document.

[2] For a detailed schedule of the research sessions, please see Appendix C entitled Chronology of Action Research.

research in one's practice. This chapter is divided into two distinct sections, the first being the action that occurred before the actual data gathering component of the research, with the second section being the second through fifth action research cycles.

Data Collection and Analysis

Before delving further into exploring the actual format involved in the action research orientation, it is necessary to discuss what the data looked like and how they were analyzed. To begin with, it must be stated that throughout the entire research process a research journal was kept. Within these coil-bound scribblers were running notes from classes and/or meetings attended on campus or at the ATA head office. In addition to these notes specific comments spawned from informal conversations with academic staff, cooperating teachers and student teachers were also recorded. In addition to these contributions, this journal also acted as a storehouse for information gleaned from books or periodical articles researched.

Later as the action research process was initiated, this journal was home for my session field notes. At the start of each action research cohort discussion an overhead view of the meeting room would be stretched. Around the centrally featured gathering table would be placed the names of those in attendance. Below this diagram, and as the conversation unfolded, paraphrased statements that seemed to resonate within the cohort were recorded. Situating the names of each member in attendance in such a way allowed me to provide ownership for those statements and would allow me to later visualize the conversation as I listened to the audio tape.

This visualizing of the conversation also permitted me to personally transcribe each session much more efficiently and effectively. By personally transcribing each session in the days following the event I detected the nuances of each person's contributions. By carefully listening to what I saw as the immediate themes within the dialogue, I was also permitted to craft a focus for subsequent sessions. This process of tape recording conversations, transcribing these conversations, analyzing the transcript data for immediate themes and then scripting the focal point of the next session by inviting guests

or researching for needed information, repeated itself during each of the cycles.

Individual conversations were also undertaken at the conclusion of each action research cycle. These individual interviews were audio taped, transcribed immediately and approved in writing by each cohort member. During these follow-up conversations, each cohort member was asked to reflect and share stories about her professional growth during the action research cycle. As I moved from the first to second and third cycles I narrowed my focus and limited my engagement in this process by asking for conversations with only those people who identified themselves as being committed to the action research cohort, namely the six participants.

At the end of every cycle I looked for emergent themes in the data from that time period. These questions would help spawn themes. These themes then contributed to what I wanted to take into the next cycle. At the end of the five cycles, when I began to write this dissertation, I searched back over the entire process looking for reoccurring themes. An overview of these questions and activities is presented in the following charts.

Cycles	Questions	Actions	Further Questions
Pilot Cycle (Winter 1999)	• How many for a cohort?	• trolling for action research participants	• Do I accept 3rd person solicitations?
	• How do I solicit participants?	• facilitating student teacher/ action research participant dialogue	• Should the voice of student teachers be included?
Cycle Two (Fall 1999)	• Why did none of the pilot cycle participants return?	• inviting U of A academic staff to sessions	• Where is the most suitable location?
	• How can the cohort be diversified?	• asking cohort members to speak at a U of A conference	• How much of my past should I bring to my research?

Figure 9a: Questions and Actions

Cycles	Questions	Actions	Further Questions
Cycle Three (Winter 2000)	• Can new members be successfully incorporated into an established cohort?	• extending unabashed invitations	• What are the components of a successful action research session?
	• Where is the difference between being invited and being told?	• locating session at the U of A campus	• Does the campus location invoke meaningful discussion?
Cycle Four (Fall 2000)	• What is my role in leading discussions?	• involving U of A academic staff in discussions	• Can I facilitate change through purposeful silence?
	• Can meaningful discussion occur with intermittent participant guests?	• focusing sessions on purposeful endeavours - creating a touchstone document	• What is the role of professional conversations in pre-service or inservice teacher professional growth?
Cycle Five (Winter 2001)	• Is there a balance between the demands of a researcher and the needs of a cohort?	• inviting student teachers to share their successes and/or suggestion for improvement	• What is the difference between pre-service and inservice teacher professional growth?
	• Is 'Going Public' necessary for knowledge creation and action research success?	• traveling to, and presenting at, the WestCAST conference	• What knowledge is essential for mentoring student teachers?
		• co-organizing and shaped at the conference	• How is this knowledge about student teaching presenting at the University of Alberta?

Figure 9b: Questions and Actions

While the explanations of the cycles and the research that accompanied these cycles, may look linear, the harvesting of data was, at times, not deliberate. A great deal of energy has

been invested in the process of responding to light-bulb moments. By light-bulb moments I refer to purpose-driven events that presented themselves to either the cohort as a whole or to myself. The suddenness of these events required immediate attention and took our research in a new directions so that we might exercise our new knowledge. Events such as attending an out-of-town conference or hosting a campus-based conference changed the dynamic and purpose of our discussions. In addition to the research provided by the action research cohort through these major events, as an undergraduate instructor I was afforded the opportunity to discuss student teaching concerns with both student teachers and cooperating teachers. I actively sought out conversations in the form of testimonials from both groups and, when possible, asked them to document, in writing, their field experience success stories with me.

Preface to Inquiry

Part of the positioning process of this inquiry is the presentation of the research that resulted from our teacher/researcher cohort. My concern was that the voice, stories and discoveries of the collaborative collective would not be adequately conveyed, for the multitude of vignettes and testimonials could not possibly be included in the text. The intimidating task of compiling adequate examples of the dialogue from within the cohort, which reflected a change in practice while working with student teachers was, at times, problematic. Fletcher (2000) noted the importance of hearing the voice of mentors

> [i]t is a simple but daunting fact that most of the research about mentoring [or in this case working with preservice teachers] that has been published has been written by people who have never done it ... Some of it is excellent nevertheless, but some of it does not represent mentoring as a mentor knows it. Why? Perhaps because mentors tend not to tell anyone else -- or at least anyone beyond their school -- what it is like to mentor. (p . 44)

Throughout this research, it became increasingly apparent that the intention of the action research cohort was to improve the quality of the whole school experiences by also improving the way in which field experience programming was interpreted by both the

student teachers and the cooperating teachers within host schools. This undertaking created concerns, one of which was the subtle and seductive urge to return to the information dissemination that plagued my earlier graduate work. The next sub-section is a snap shot overview of the dates/time/locations and events which led up to this study and consists of both the gaining entry and pilot study components of this research process.

Gaining Entry into an Established Community

Over the course of the 1998 fall term, many of my graduate student peers, already committed to action research as a mode of inquiry, agonized publicly over the prospect of "gaining entry" (Bilash, 1999; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) into a previously established community or perhaps establishing their own action research cohort. Whenever these exchanges transpired, the most recurring question asked of my research peers was, 'Who are the collaborators and how will they be affected?' (journal notes, October 8/98).

The targeting of participants for the future pilot study did not concern me, for I realized that by being in the numerous roles of graduate student, university facilitator, former school coordinator and cooperating teacher, I was at the intersection of multiple overlapping circles of potential participants. Buoyed with this realization, it became much easier to envision soliciting educators to join in the action research process with the intent of examining the mentoring of student teachers. Because this realization occurred rather early in the planning stage, it only left the problem of who the participants would be. While other members of the course expressed their concerns well into the second term, I returned from the 1998/99 winter recess moving confidently about the preliminary courses of this graduate program -- until I realized that a solicitation process needed to occur. This task therefore raised further questions, including, 'Which method of soliciting these potential participants would be most effective, including when and where?' (Bilash, 1999).

Canvassing from School Board Leadership Classes

My first inclination was to solicit participants from the two leadership classes then being offered by my employer. These two groups of educators, each consisting of approximately 20 - 25 members, all of whom had expressed an interest in becoming potential leaders and/or principals within Edmonton Public Schools[3], met throughout the year. Returning from winter break with a gauge of the scope and size of the research, and with the term two field experience start up dates fast approaching, I sought, and was granted, advance permission from those responsible for organizing and instructing the courses to solicit participants for my action research cohort. With a clearer vision of the participants coming into focus, the creation of the mandatory Ethics Review[4] document became considerably less daunting. Once ethics approval had been received, the final stage of the first planning section of the action research loop (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997, p. 11) had been completed. All that remained was actually to commence with the solicitation of group members, a technique referred to as "trolling for participants" (Carson, 1998a).

My first foray at canvassing participants for the pilot study occurred at the start of the winter term, January 11, 1999. Unfortunately, the first of two after-school sessions to which I planned to present the research proposal fell during what could be described as the most severe blizzard of the winter season. Inching and sliding towards the public school board administration office, my mind raced with thoughts of fellow class members having to navigate the same roads -- after a full day of teaching! Halted in snowbound, grid-locked traffic, my mind raced with the following concerns, 'Would they be receptive to an appeal for participants?', 'What was the motivation for these participants to come together to form this cadre for the duration of the second half of the academic school year?'

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[3] These people were currently enrolled in either a 10 week Leadership Training & Development (LT&D) or a 20 week Principal Training & Development (P&D) courses. Sessions occur both after-school and weekends throughout the school year.

[4] See appendix A for a copy of the Action Research Permission Form and appendix B for a copy of the Actual Name in Print Permission Form.

Arriving early I observed cold and harried classmates enter the seminar room, and, as if previously scripted, complain conspicuously of the commute. Then, again according to a preordained story line, each moved immediately to the refreshment table, where they hastily poured a cup of coffee and made a selection from the dessert squares. Feeling fraudulent (McIntosh, 1984), foolish and with self-confidence plunging like the temperature outside, I mingled with those I knew, as thoughts of saving face by removing myself from the evening's agenda swirled like the outside snow about my brain. Because these groups would not convene again for another two weeks, this meeting was critical for getting the word out (Bilash, 1999; Carson, 1998a). The concern was that by delaying the introduction of the proposed research focus group, the potential collaborators would miss the essential lead-up time required to "meet in order to raise problems so that ideas about how to improve them" (J. Norris, personal communication, October 29, 1999) could be initiated before the winter field experience, scheduled to start in three weeks time.

Without the "planning" or first stage of the action research cycle, it was felt that the data which would be harvested would not be authentic. This would leave me in the unenviable position of piloting a research group in the fall of 1999, delaying the tentatively scheduled candidacy exam and therefore the official startup of the research. All these postponements would eventually culminate with the potential of returning to full time employment still needing to complete the documentation process.[5] At the time this was clearly not a good choice, and anxiety built as thoughts of being placed in a position to choose between my own personal goals and the interests of people within my profession (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999) mounted within me. I felt that I was compromising personal professionalism by initiating a research process that I had not yet grown into. As well I felt embarrassed for allowing the concerns of both personal and academic time lines to interfere with the events associated with human time or public school schedules. As a result I began to question myself and my motives, 'Could the creation of a trusting community occur under such stress?'

Like the eventual calm after the storm, the cacophonous emotions of hypocrisy, dishonor

[5] A situation that eventually occurred, despite my best efforts to beat the clock.

and ineptitude subsided with the realization that the potential for tremendous professional growth and knowledge building was also available by inclusion in such an action research cadre (Fullan et al, 1998). This epiphany resonated throughout my body moments before I was to address the group, for it was clear that if people were truly too busy for this professional endeavour, they would not offer themselves to be a member of the action research cohort. I also reminded myself that by being a member of the profession this theme of "being of service" to the professoriate is also part of the Faculty of Education's (U of A) significant commitment to the ideals of partnership and collegial dispensation via the CSI and is reflected in the Department of Secondary Education chair's comments when he emphasized in the thrice yearly department newsletter, "We want to be of service to the field -- many schools and school districts recognize that curriculum and teachers are central to their mandate. We want to support and encourage their efforts" (Carson, October 1998b).

By providing this service, potential participants were also being offered a choice, an option which included entering a space where making meaning (Lambert, 1995, p. 34) of the sometimes nebulous roles and responsibilities of both cooperating teacher and school coordinators could take place. The ambiguity of these roles is best summed up with Ninele's words half way through the research, at a point where she was contemplating assuming the role of school coordinator, "I remember hearing all this stuff about what the [school] coordinator did and it sounded really overwhelming!" (Ninele, February 22, 2001). In keeping with a previously established comfort level while public speaking, a speech was prepared, drafted, and rehearsed (Figure 10). Bolstered by the notion of professionalism through the acts of assistance and encouragement, I initiated the spiel.

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen:

It's my pleasure to be here. I promised [name of course organizer] that I would not take more than five minutes of your class time, so if I extend past the five minutes mark, can somebody put the hook around my neck? Anyway, my name is Stephen Leppard, and I'm currently completing course work in a graduate program at the University of Alberta. I've reached a point in my program where I need to start gathering data. The area I would like to study is field experience and how we, as teachers, can make field experience more meaningful, powerful, and educational for those involved.

To do this I need the help of people in the schools who are actually working with and planning for student teachers. I'm proposing that we meet and discuss what we're doing at our schools for or with student teachers. Each of us is doing activities or events in our schools with student teachers and I need to hear what's working, what needs fixing and what problems need solutions.

This type of research is called Action Research, and a pivotal component of Action Research is that all members of the group learn and gain form the experience of coming together to share information in the hopes of gaining knowledge.

By coming together, I hope that each member of the group can return to their school with ideas and suggestions for making the student teacher's time in your schools more meaningful for everyone involved in the process.

This group is not meant to add more stress to your life; instead, it's meant to relieve some of the stress you may be feeling as you plan for field experience students. Hopefully, together, with the help of the other group members, we'll develop programming for our schools that elevates the standard of field experience in each school.

Figure 10: Trolling for Participants

However, for the actual five-minute presentation, the set speech was not read. Instead it was clear that a sincere, honest, folksy introduction of myself and the area of study would be best for the situation. The words informal practitioner research were used, which, according to McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1999), is research undertaken by "individuals in their own practice" (p. 8).

While cognizant of the blizzard outside, and the fact that people might not take kindly to being asked to become involved in something else, comfort was drawn from the warmth of the non-verbal response, which included a number of heads nodding in approval and notes being written down during the component of the speech when dates and times of the next meetings were mentioned. Stringer (1996), while commenting on the necessity of establishing contact while setting the stage, has suggested that "initial contact should be informative and neutral" (p. 44). Aware of the previously agreed time limitation, I ended the somewhat dispassionate solicitation by granting the opportunity for questions from the assembled. Receiving none, I left numerous business cards on the coffee and dessert square table located at the entrance of the room.

Consciously Rejecting Conscription

As I proceeded to the door, a member from the gathered group passed me his business card with another person's name hastily written on the back. The owner of the card, a vice principal, explained that the penciled in name was that of the person responsible for facilitating student teachers during field experiences at his host school site. With the delivery of the card, I was encouraged to "give him a call because he may be interested" (personal journal, October 1999). I never did make the call. While initially proud that I have rejected this form of conscription, as the first day following the solicitation blended to the next, I began to question my motives for not placing the phone call as well as my motivation for the entire research project. This led to the question, 'Why did I find the direct recruitment of participants for cohort intimidating?'

Being afforded the gift of time in which to reflect, I began to appreciate that this form of administrative referral initially made me nervous, for I felt it was presumptuous to phone

a person who had not heard my introduction. I also had concerns that the vice principal may have been suggesting that his school coordinator needed the action research cohort because of perceived deficiencies in the current field experience program being offered at their host school. Three anxious days passed before three people initiated contact, either through email or by phone, requesting to be a part of the pilot study, which was slated to commence in less than one week's time.

Pilot Study - Establishing Liftoff

During the winter term (January to April 1999) these three professionals, all of whom were full time continuous employees of elementary schools within the Edmonton Public School system, and I would converge for a total of four sessions, at the two locations represented within the cohort. The site locations of the host schools were chosen to provide as much convenience for the participants as possible (Stringer, 1996, p. 44). Because both Beth and Lynn were members of the same staff, they were asked (or they offered - I'm sure it is the latter) to host both the initial and second afterschool sessions. The third cohort member then asked if she could host both the third and fourth sessions.

Discourse within these first sessions was exceedingly pragmatic and topical, with the discussion pointed firmly in the direction of solving perceived difficulties within field experience at host schools. What was most apparent was the need to address concerns related to what form a whole school experience should take. Having said this, perhaps the most impactful experience gained from the pilot study, discussed in the following two subsections, was the advent of a student teacher forum and the need to address the unsettled political concerns associated with conducting research within a large academic setting.

Student Teacher Forum

The first discourse direction that emerged from within the cohort with regards to both defining exemplary practices during field experiences as well specifying what whole school experiences are came at the request of a cohort member. Lynn, in reflecting on the

direction in which the discussions should proceed, made the suggestion to have student teachers attend an afterschool session so that "[their] voices may be heard, as well as our own" (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999, p. 33). In Lynn's own words

> if we're going to be talking about the concerns that student teachers have with regards to the whole school experience, then we should be asking them [student teachers] what they want to occur during their field experience. (Lynn, May 22, 2001)

With this suggestion from a cohort member as an impetus for further "remade" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997, p. 39) action plans, at the conclusion of the third session it was agreed that each cohort member would invite student teachers from within their host school to join the final session of the season, which at the same time was deliberately planned to take place before the end of the spring field experience round. During this session four APT student teachers from both elementary schools represented within the cohort, plus three APT students from the Junior High in which I worked as a University Facilitator, eagerly made themselves available for this afterschool discussion. Gathered around the huge conference-like staffroom table, each prospective teacher provided generous food for thought as they offered poignant, yet tactfully stated, suggestions for field experience program modification within host schools. Those in attendance gave "much more complex and layered" (Smits, 1997, p. 283) accounts while speaking first hand of successful experiences during their field experience. Conversely, while voicing or describing problematic concerns, a third person narrative, which might include a preface such as "my friend is doing their APT in another school and ....", was employed. These success stories and suggestions for host school field experience improvement were seen to be written down by all the pilot study cohort participants, including myself.

Unsettled Political Concerns

Once the pilot study of the 1999 winter term had been completed and the subsequent research proposal written I sat for the candidacy exam. At that time a great deal of discussion was generated about relying on participants from one school jurisdiction. The committee cautioned that this may be politically unwise as well as problematic in terms

of research impartiality.

One point that particularly resonated with me was that opportunities for information dissemination with regards to field experience not only need to be made equally, but, like justice, need to be seen as being made fairly. As a newly employed Field Experience Associate[6], whose role was to act as agent for both the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) as well as the Faculty of Alberta (U of A), specifically the Undergraduate Student Services unit, the responsibility for representing all the boards within the University of Alberta catchment area and not just one board responsible for 70% of field experience placements, was raised and discussed. By only accessing this particular grouping, I had not only taken the path of least resistance into gaining entry, but I also revealed a bias by favoring the board I was most familiar with. This mindset, I would be cautioned, is diametrically opposed to the "[i]nclusiveness means including everyone, not excluding people" (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999, p. 33) philosophy of action research.

Carson (October 29, 1999) drew attention not only to the apparent political bias but also to the potential flaw in the academic rigour of action research in that biases must be acknowledged in research. I grew to appreciate that if one does not acknowledge that they have a bias, one cannot possibly develop a research question -- and without a question I did not have grounds for an action research study. In hindsight I now recognize that while the pressure had been elevated by choosing to gain entry in this process, I had not so much let the participants choose me, but rather I had chosen the pool from which to select. Stringer (1996) counseled that "research facilitators also cannot afford to be associated too closely with any one of the stakeholder groups in the setting (p. 47). Instead it was suggested that I expand the trolling process to include the other boards that constituted the Faculty of Education (U of A) field experience area within northern Alberta. This discussion allowed for further critical self reflection to occur and spawned the question, 'Which is the best way to solicit participants?'

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[6] A Field Experience Associate is a seconded teacher from the Edmonton area who is responsible for multiple duties while on campus, including instruction of undergraduate courses as well as liaison with multiple host schools.

Commencing with Action Research

Now that an introduction of the events that transpired during the lead up to action research has occurred, I now describe the particular action research project. The next four subsections will be chronologically ordered to explain in detail not only the order of events, but also the landmark uncovered in each cycle. Starting with the second cycle and proceeding through the third, fourth and fifth action research cycles, the reader will detect emergent themes that will eventually be revisited in the concluding chapters of this document. This revisiting of landmark themes is imperative to the validity of this research. This necessity to authenticate the research process is supported by Silverman (2000) when he suggests that, "[u]nless you can show your audience the procedures you used to ensure that your methods were reliable and your conclusion valid, there is little point in aiming to conclude a research dissertation" (p. 175).

Second Action Research Cycle - Increased Diversity

The second action research cycle consisted of three sessions, in November and December, 1999. During this action research cycle there were a total of six educators[7], all from three of the larger school boards in the Edmonton area, including almost equal representation from both elementary schools (grades kindergarten through six) and junior high schools (grades seven through nine). Included were a principal, a vice principal, two school coordinators and two cooperating teachers, all new to the action research process. All members of the pilot study were absent, which raised the question, 'Why did none of the pilot cohort choose to return to the action research process?'

Despite the disappointment of not drawing the previous cohort members back, the action research process brought confidence. The second rounds of both the action research cycle and the field experience afforded me a certain degree of relaxed concentration (Gelb and Buzan, 1995). Part of the relaxed nature of these sessions resulted when I called upon two guest speakers, Drs. Lynn Gordon Calvert and Kathy Sanford, to explain specific

[7] Included in this cohort were Marlene, Sherry and Ninele.

field experience requirements within the undergraduate program. The subsequent seven subsections -- trolling an already committed audience, receiving instantaneous reactions, initiating the intimidating first session, the uncertainties of providing hospitality, encouraging a humorous tone and the inaugural field experience conference -- reveal my need to proceed through this research project, and life for that matter, as a participant in the learning process.

Trolling an Already Committed Audience

I solicited additional participants for the official action research cohort at the annual 'Wine and Cheese' for School Coordinators held at the Faculty Club, a palatial, golf-and-country club-like environment located within the University of Alberta campus on the south bank of the North Saskatchewan River in October of 1999. Approximately two hours in length, these primarily afterschool social events are intended to acknowledge the significant contributions of school coordinators from host schools within CSI schools from multiple educational jurisdictions within the University of Alberta student teacher distribution area. The word 'significant' is deliberately employed in this context, for it was at these social functions that I first became aware of the CSI and the value placed on "[t]he [school] coordinator's knowledge of the talents, personalities, and mentoring abilities of the school staff [that has become] invaluable to the success of the field experience program" (Yurick, 2000b, p. 4).

This function traditionally has two distinct components, the first being official greetings which last no longer than 30 minutes. During this time the 40-50 guests listened to greetings from the Dean's office as well as success stories from preselected Collaborative Initiative schools. The second portion of the evening is intended to be much longer and to encourage participant dialogue. While the greetings were always appreciated and the testimonials beneficial, it was during the social mingling that I sought the opportunity to dialogue with peers in order to gain the information I felt I needed to assist me in carrying out the role of the School Coordinator. A year-and-a-half into the research cohort membership, Marlene echoed these sentiments about this event lamenting that there was not enough time to dialogue with people who are experiencing a problem or concern with

regards to student teachers:

> You know at our beginning meeting, they had the wine and cheese ... great to see everybody and I know in the past we have done different things with teachers in small discussions groups, but you don't get enough of that. I think that this [Action Research cohort] is a really valuable experience for me. Teachers do need to talk to each other, even within the same school. (Marlene, March 1, 2000)

Having received permission to address the gathering during the formal speeches portion of the program, I arrived and noticed that I was placed last on the printed program. As the first few speeches progressed, the assembled crowd seemed to grow restless while waiting for the informal section of the program to start so that dialoguing with their peers could commence. Sensing this restlessness, I decided to abbreviate the prepared speech and opt instead to speak directly, and without notes, to the potential participants in terms of what I thought they would like to hear. In other words, I used knowledge gained from previous informal discussion with cooperating teachers to calibrate my solicitation towards honest recognition of both my research needs and the empowerment of cooperating teachers to effect change in their practice with student teachers. Kemmis & McTaggart (1997) suggested, "you should probably lay your cards on the table about how any research process you get underway will affect your self-interest and the self-interest of others involved and affected" (p. 56). I spoke of how the potential action research cohort discussions would benefit all those who chose to become involved, including myself. I shared how I once felt personal concerns about not knowing whether the field experience program which was planned, acted on and observed for student teachers at my host school actually fit within the mandate of the current CSI. I spoke of my appetite to come to these social functions in order to network with peers and then leave the event having created new knowledge. I also drew attention to my former cooperating teacher, Robin, and how, together, we spent time comparing notes and drawing up an ad hoc plan for whole school experiences within our individual host school sites. I also emphasized lamenting that seven months would transpire before being able to touch base and follow up with Faculty of Education staff and fellow preservice teacher educators to evaluate and replan such whole school events (personal journal, October 8,

1999).

Drawing on the work of many researchers including, Fullan et al, 1998, Greenwood & Levin, 1998, Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997, McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999 and Stringer, 1996, I talked with them about what I thought we should do. I spoke of attempting to create a place were broad-based and bottom-up discussions would be employed. I stressed that I was aiming to build an atmosphere of trust and mutual support in order to provide opportunities for increased dialogue among those involved in the mentoring process. By stressing the opportunity for participants to gain insight, share success stories, have significant input and create networks where ideas and dialogue could continue to flow long after the sessions had concluded, I hoped the appeal for participants would strike a resonate chord. While the term action research was used and the stress on being "equal and full participants in the research process" (Stringer, 1996, p. 9) was made, its intricacies and rigour were not emphasized.

Receiving Instantaneous Reactions

Almost immediately I was approached. The first potential participant, an elementary school administrator with a Master's degree from the Faculty of Education (U of A) and interested in the processes involved in mentoring novice teachers, proceeded to pass over a hastily penned list of questions and/or suggestions which she had generated during the solicitation (Figure 11).

As we conversed regarding her written ideas, Marlene, a school coordinator at the time (who eventually became a cohort member, an FEA co-worker, a fellow educational researcher and a good friend), approached and presented her personal business card. After introductions, and in keeping with the practice employed during the pilot study the previous academic year, the first two confirmed participants were encouraged to dictate

the date of the first meeting[8], for it was felt that the group would be successful if the set of principles and procedures were agreed upon by the people within the group. With two committed participants, it was agreed that the initial meeting of the first official action research cycle would be November 14, 1999. The next "procedural aspect of the action research approach" (Smits, 1997, p. 283) was the need to establish a median location for our sessions. With one potential cohort member driving in from a small satellite community 20 minutes south of the city of Edmonton and Marlene coming from St. Albert[9], it was also decided that these sessions should be located equidistant within the city, at a (then) yet to be determined school location. We agreed gathering times would assume a traditional afterschool "inservice format" and start at approximately 4:15 pm and conclude no later than

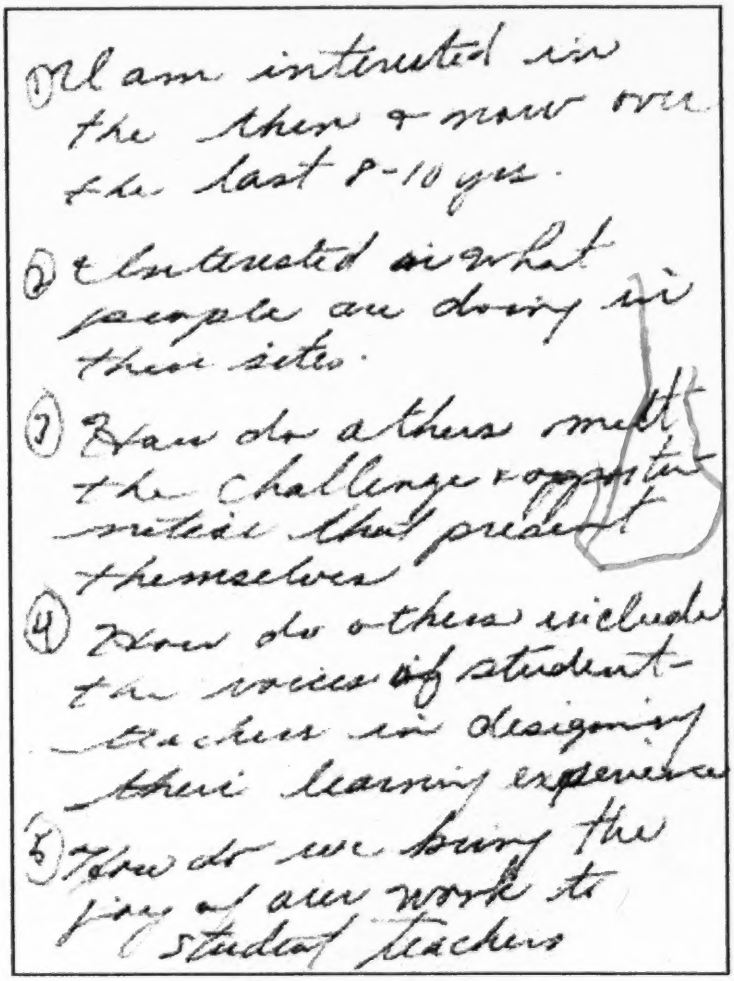
1) I am interested in the then + now over the last 8-10 yrs.
2) I am interested in what people are doing in their sites.
3) How do others meet the challenge + opportunities that present themselves
4) How do others include the voices of student-teachers in designing their learning experiences
5) How do we bring the joy of our work to student teachers

Figure 11: Cohort Input

[8] As the group grew in membership during the subsequent year, this practice would later become problematic for members began to require increased information with regards to the upcoming schedule, to the point where at the conclusion of the third year of the study, meetings during the fifth phase of the cycle were planned by the proceeding winter break. In the words of a participant "I really appreciate knowing the dates ahead of time as our calendars fill up so quickly this time of year" (P. B. Nov. 20/00).

[9] St. Albert is a satellite community 15 minutes north of the city with two autonomous school boards.

5:30 p.m. Stringer (1996) verifies this collaborative stance when planning gathering times by proposing that "[f]acilitators should establish convenient times and places to meet with people ... [t]his condition of 'ownership' is an important element of community-based action research" (p. 44).

As the evening continued, queries from three additional school coordinators were fielded. While two of these people would eventually join the cohort in progress, one volunteered a location for the first and third meetings of the fall term. Leaving the faculty club that night, I felt a subtle yet profound shift away from the planning towards the acting mode (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997, p. 11). The sensation was rewarding yet intimidating! Rewarding in that the concerns of the lack of representation from different school jurisdictions of the study group had been addressed. Intimidating in that the new potential members, all of whom were women, seemed to have acquired a tremendous amount of experience and expertise with regards to student teaching concerns and field experience issues.

Soliciting Participants via Print

Once the times and location of the initial meeting were established, I felt the requirement to validate the action research process by soliciting additional participants through the print media. With only three members in the pilot cohort the year before, I also wished to expand and diversify the membership of the cohort by recruiting either male members or high school educators. Already buoyed by the instantaneous response received from the personal invitation for participants the week before, I sought and received permission to diversify the trolling process further by submitting the following informative article in the thrice yearly Undergraduate Student Services newsletter entitled the 'Collaborative Chronicles[10].'

[10] Collaborative Chronicles grew out of the concern from the CSI organizers for the need to communicate effectively with an ever increasing number of schools. With a first issue dating back to October 1997, the Chronicles were designed both to provide information to the schools about CSI and to celebrate some of the outstanding field experiences that were being offered by the schools (Yurick, 2000a, p. 9).

It should also be noted that the process of submitting an advertisement was repeated during the start up phase of the 2000/2001 school year and print material regarding the focus group and our discussions soon became a regular appearing feature of the Collaborative Schools Initiative news letter.

Focus Group on Student Teaching

The group is intended as a place where teachers who act as mentors can gather to share success stories and gain ideas for future field experience rounds. It also serves as a place where questions get answered with the help of experienced preservice teacher educators who share their expertise with persons who find themselves in the role for the first time.

If you are interested in gaining information or sharing quality ideas, this student teacher "think tank" could be the forum you're looking for. Make this event part of your professional growth plan while you energize your work with student teachers.

Meetings are usually held on campus immediately after school once every three or four weeks. And there is always lots of snack food. New members with fresh ideas are always welcome.

For further information please contact **Stephen Leppard** by phone at **492-0243** or by email at **sleppard@ualberta.ca**

Figure 12: Collaborative Chronicles

With a fall 1999 circulation of over 600 schools in the Edmonton area, it was felt that the information would attract further interested participants who may not have been able to attend the autumn "Wine and Cheese" function. As a result of the newsletters, and with a firm date for the first session established, several subsequent e-mail inquiries from interested persons were responded to with specifics regarding meeting times, scheduled dates and locations. One came from a male cooperating teacher.

Initiating the Intimidating First Session

Once the initial process of trolling for participants had been initiated, a sense of momentum developed. While thrilled to have the nucleus of an action research cohort, the realization that these volunteers were coming to a fledgling meeting was daunting. As I contemplated the importance of first impressions, personal questions regarding participant involvement in the research were required, 'Why do volunteers do this research?' and 'Why are they coming?' (Bilash, 1999).

In keeping with the previously established pattern of hosting sessions at various host school sites within the Edmonton area, an initial offer to locate the first session (November 14, 1999) of the second action research cycle at a junior high school within south central Edmonton was accepted immediately. However, after arriving early and being shown the proposed area for the session by the on-site teacher, I became concerned. While the comfortably refurbished learning resources center (library) was promising, its location in relation to the front of the school entrance was problematic, for it could prove difficult to locate without clearly labeled directions or assistance. After assembling and testing the tape recorder and table microphone, laying out food on an adjacent table and repositioning the four small tables and the accompanying padded chairs into a dining room style arrangement, I decided to position myself at the front approach of the school and escort each new member to the library. With the time approaching 4:00 p.m., I readied myself for the first person. During the interval I was reminded of the times, as a school coordinator, that I'd waited at the school's narthex-like front doors for student teachers to arrive on the first day of their visits to Mary Butterworth School. While pausing, I also questioned,

> Who would constitute the group?
>
> Were they, like me, the product of a less-than-stellar field experience as an undergraduate or were they motivated by some other factors?
>
> What would be their motivation for dedicating time and energies to the group?
>
> How can I encourage them to sustain their involvement in the group?

Providing Uncertain Hospitality

My mounting uncertainties with regards to providing appropriate hospitality were interrupted by the arrival of the first person. Greeted with a handshake and a "thank you for coming," she entered the school, and became the first of six public school educators in the action research process. Our initial conversation transpired during the walk to the library. Entering the library, I was surprised and encouraged to observe the school coordinator, the person who had made the initial hosting offer, waiting. After initiating introductions, I drew their attention to a sidetable, where fresh coffee, juice, a selection of fresh baked breads and a variety of spreads awaited them. This small offering of food and drink not only provided participants with the necessary energy injection for the after-school session, it was also meant to serve as a gracious acknowledgment of their contributions to the session. Sergiovanni (1994) quotes fellow researcher Rist (1980) as suggesting that, while food is important, it is not the sole reason for congregating together. Rather there is a more soulful explanation:

> People almost never eat just to be fed, but also to communicate with others (to share bread and salt, bread and wine, etc.). A meal is a way of understanding and organizing relationships with both the natural and social environment. (Sergiovanni quoting Rist [1980] p. 65)

As one participant stated, "I think everyone appreciated the food." This same person then concluded her culinary reflection with a humourous Martha Stewart impersonation, "You know ... that's a good thing" (L.PW., May 8, 2000, p. 9). This gracious, and greatly appreciated, verbal recognition is mentioned by Palmer (1998) when he suggests that, "[b]y offering hospitality, one participates in an endless reweaving of a social fabric on which all can depend -- thus the gift of sustenance for the guest becomes a gift of hope for the host" (p. 50).

Buoyed with hope and sensing that a conversation had taken root, I excused myself and cycled back through the labyrinth-like halls to the front entrance in anticipation of the next guest. The next participant arrived as I entered the school's front vestibule. The pattern of an escorted walk and personal introductions was repeated for each of the five

guests. I ensured introductions, including first names, were carried out.

During the looping journeys back to the doorway, I thought of my parents' ministry and of the elderly gentleman farmer who, standing at the narthex, had extended his weathered hand to all who entered our church community each Sunday. As this reflection entered my mind I questioned, 'How much of my past was I bringing, or should I bring, to my research?'

Encouraging a Humourous Tone

Once the six assembled members[11] had nourished themselves, completed their name tags and taken a seat, an icebreaker activity was initiated that asked each group member to employ lines from famous motion pictures during a fictitious "end-of-day" debriefing conversation with student teachers. After a brief pause Sherry established a humorous tone by framing her wise dialogue in the following manner:

> My scenario is the following: my student teacher is beginning to feel overwhelmed by the amount of work she, as a teacher, needs to do. Perhaps it's her second week of a four-week field experience. She is exasperated by the marking, the planning, the lunchtime and afterschool supervision, the preparation of report cards and the impending student-led conferences. She comes to me seeking advice!!
>
> Feeling equally overwhelmed, I can only empathize her feeling by saying, 'For those that like that sort of thing, that is the sort of thing they like!' (Sherry, November 4, 1999)

With this dead-panned utterance the others who were now seated around the table, myself included, erupted into spontaneous laughter. Greenwood and Levin (1998) recommend the use of humor as an "indispensable tool [for it] evokes tacit knowledge [and may] provoke people to respond and to become active" (p 107). As each group

[11] Including Marlene, Ninele and Sherry, who would continue to be involved throughout the five cycles of the research process.

member contributed their classic movie line[12], laughter mounted within the collective. Upon reflection I speculated, 'Was an educational community being formed?'

Once again I thought back to the conversations I observed and participated in as a young child and then again as a novice teacher and reminisced as to how they seemed to move from person to person by some latent rule of cooperation.

Field Experience Conference

The final event within this second action research cycle was the initial involvement of some cohort members in the recently initiated field experience conference for site-based teacher educators. Early in the fall of 1999 a proposal to host a half day, two session conference was presented to the then Associate Dean of Field Experience and subsequently approved by both the Department of Elementary Education and the CSI. Pivotal in the planning of this event was its timing, which saw nearly 50 site-based teacher educators return to the Faculty of Education building on the same day that approximately 350 Elementary APT student teachers were expected to return from their field experience for their previously established one day "call back" conference. By staging these conferences concurrently, it was hoped that both student teachers and cooperating teachers would encourage each other to attend their respective conferences. It also allayed the ATA concerns that cooperating teachers would avoid calling in a supply teacher for the morning in favour of leaving their student teacher responsible for classes.

Upon approval for the half-day teacher conference, I immediately thought back to both the multitude of informal discussions I had had with school coordinators and cooperating teachers as well as to the topics discussed during the five preceding action research sessions. These cohort members' concerns served as the impetus for action in this regard. The finalized plan for the conference included offering those in attendance the

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[12] Other examples of famous motion picture dialogue employed during the first session would include,
"Years from now when you talk about this, ... and you will, ... be kind" (Tea & Sympathy)
or
"Attention must finally be paid to such a man" (Death of a Salesman)

opportunity to come to the U of A campus to take in two selections from a choice of five sessions[13], which included: 1) **Role of the University Facilitator** during field experience, 2) how working with a student teacher constitutes **Teacher Professional Growth Plans,** 3) **Evaluation Writing** for student teachers, 4) **Dealing with Conflicts** while supervising student teachers and 5) an overview of the **Collaborative Schools Initiative**.

During this reflection and planning time, Beth, Lynn, Marlene, Ninele, Sherry and I also thought about each session and the tone each speaker should bring to the forum. Quite simply we desired to have these sessions replicate the communicative and collaborative tone of the action research, where those in attendance were encouraged to first gather information, then create understanding with the hopes of eventually constructing new knowledge with regards to working with student teachers through open ended discourse and communication. Therefore, it was decided to call upon Beth and Lynn to present an overview of their experiences within the CSI. While not being current members of the action research cohort, as participant members of the pilot cohort, they had not only engaged in a mutual discourse process, but had also taken responsibility for creating a dynamic model of collaboration during the field experience at their host school. This example, which featured weekly meetings with both the cooperating teacher and student teachers, was not only garnering praise from within Undergraduate Student Services, but also from their host school staff and all levels of student teachers at their host school.

The Third Action Research Cycle - Increased Membership

While the core of six cohort members, including Marlene, Sherry and Ninele remained consistent from the second action research cycle, which took place from January - April 2000, additional members continued to ebb and flow within our community during the five sessions which occurred between January - April 2000.

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[13] These five sessions are in bold text to highlight the titles of each session offered to Cooperating Teachers and School Coordinators.

Although the number of participants at each of the five sessions varied greatly, the personal honesty and professional commitment shown by those in attendance indicated a continued transformation within the cohort, and, as will be discussed later, within myself. The following three subsections -- announcing invitations, the consternation of choosing a location, and hosting a typical meeting -- will reveal that not only was a collaborative cohort being formed but the cohort members were beginning to take initiative in order to become involved in defining and exploring the problems under investigation (Stringer, 1996, p.46).

Announcing Invitations

It was during the third action research cycle that I began to differentiate between announcing to peers upcoming action research sessions and, instead, extending invitations to join the cohort. Only after piloting or rehearsing the entire program, including the initial solicitation process, did I feel comfortable seeking out and asking people if they wished to acquire further information regarding whole school experiences or student teacher expectations and the field experience protocol within the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. Tom (1997) refers to the act of reflecting on trial run attempts and suggests that, "[a]fter piloting the entire program once or twice and reflecting on what has been learned, we should be ready to discuss the philosophical basis and the goals of the program and formalize these in writing if that has not already occurred" (p. 179).

An example of how a deeper philosophical understanding of the action research process had led to an increased comfort level while soliciting additional participants occurred in the spring of the first year while I was in the midst of the annual 'Spring Banquet' social gathering at the Faculty Club. Immediately after the supper portion of the evening, I was approached by a fellow Field Experience Associate with the request to speak to a person who had expressed an interest in the cohort. I approached the person and, sensing their interest, invited them to attend the next meeting, which was the final session of the season.

The previous story is highlighted, for I would not have moved so assertively the year before (personal journal, Oct. 2000) because at the time I had neither created a philosophical basis nor established research goals for the action research program being initiated. Instead, I had launched a process with no intended target or destination. In a way I had followed the observation of Tom (1997) when he says, "In a sense we do the program to create it, not create the program to do it" (p. 179). Only after completing both the pilot and then the second loop of the action research cycle, could I observe and document that those who partook in the monthly dialogue process were impacted by the power of discourse and as such had reported not only a change within their personal and professional practice with student teachers but also a change in terms of how they viewed and interacted with both their fellow site-based preservice teacher educators and their students as well. By observing the impact the discussions had on the six cohort members, I felt more confident and was better able to proposition potential participants or engage in dialogue regarding either the action research process or the role of the cooperating mentor teachers. Beth would later comment on the tenuous craft of trolling for participants when she cautioned,

> [t]here is a big difference between *being told* [by a school administrator to attend the action research sessions] and *being invited*. (Beth, May 15, 2001, speaker's emphasis)

This reflective interpretation of the entire action research technique allowed me to reevaluate the practices of recruitment of potential action research cohort members in subsequent cycles. As a result I was much more confident with my invitations.

Choosing a Location

The second transformation which occurred within this loop was my acknowledgement and eventual resolution of the location for sessions. Throughout my initial graduate level course work, I was afforded the opportunity to hear previous practitioner researchers, most of whom were public school administrators, discuss either hosting (in their homes) elaborate supper meetings, arranging all day sessions on Saturdays or facilitating entire

weekend retreats for their research groups. Originally intimidated by the thought of opening my modest graduate student/teacher-salary home, these suggestions were also professionally disconcerting, for I neither felt comfortable using my abode as a research location or devoting time, which was usually dedicated to addressing the needs of a young family, to a full day weekend session.

After I mulled over this concern, I concluded that neither my home nor my weekend time would be employed in the action research. Instead I decided to continue the third action research cycle by soliciting participants for input not just with regards to timing, but also to volunteer locations of the afterschool meetings. However, this practice was soon modified. During the closing comments of the final session of the preceeding action research cycle on December 1st, 1999, I sought a volunteer to offer their school as a site for the next meeting, approximately three weeks away. Having no responses, I hesitantly proposed the Faculty of Education building at the University of Alberta campus for the site of the first session of the third action research cycle, January 19, 2000. Those in attendance immediately expressed their support, stating that the central location of the U of A campus would be advantageous to those traveling from long distances at the end of a sustained working day. A few mentioned that it would be nice to not worry about hosting others in their school at the end of the day. Still others voiced philosophical considerations that the Faculty of Education can, or should be, a place for both professional growth and personal renewal. Britzman (1991) supports the use of campuses for this endeavour as she suggests that "[a] discourse can become powerful when it is institutionally sanctioned" (p. 17). Ninele, who throughout the entire length of the study continued to be a strong advocate of not only the practitioner research process, but the University of Alberta campus as the site of meetings, echoed this sentiment with the following personal example of how the location of the meetings had impacted her classroom practice,

> But the other thing that was wonderful ... going back to the University is a wonderful lift for a person that is in the classroom. There's an excitement about coming back to campus. I tell my students that I have a meeting at the University of Alberta. They [Ninele's classroom students] are really pleased with the connection. (Ninele, May 3, 2000)

Hosting a Typical Meeting

Once the primary campus location had been established for the third action research cycle, the next form of transformation within this action research cycle is the hosting of a typical action research session. Each of the five sessions was unique. However, a number of global similarities were also observed.

- participants began to draw together at or near 4:00 pm.

- typically, cohort members would arrive to observe a bounty of snacks awaiting them, either cheese and crackers or, based upon request, various fresh fruit trays.

- at approximately 4:15 pm the session would commence with members gathered around a large rectangular table.

- if new members were present, informal introductions were initiated -- followed by either name tags or name cards being created.

- if no new members were present, discussion would proceed immediately.

- I would situate myself in one corner of the table, so as to control both the tape recorder and the parameter zone microphone discreetly.

- the meetings typically dismissed at 5:30. However, members often lingered to continue discussing their concerns after the tape recorder had been turned off.

The Fourth Action Research Cycle - Sustaining Participation

During the fourth action research cycle which consisted of five sessions which commenced in September 2000 and continued until December, 2000, the initial concerns of sustained participation of the cohort were viewed as problematic. They were seen to be inhibiting advancement of discourse and thus information attainment. However, upon reflection, these concerns would eventually be celebrated, for they allowed the consistent cohort members to facilitate discussion among and between those who were visiting.

By this time in my growth as an action research facilitator, I no longer felt it necessary to lead the discussion. Rather I observed the consistent cohort members articulate their newly acquired insights with regards to preservice teacher education as they patiently addressed the inquiries. Often they cited previous discussions or quoted knowledgeable invited guests. In this way the discussions built upon themselves. In his discussion concerning how an educational faculty may attempt long term undergraduate program reform, Tom (1997) proposes this similarly appropriate question about the cycles of action research, "How are the cycles of doing - planning sustained over long periods of time?" (p. 162).

They are sustained by cohort members becoming active in meaningful endeavours that advance their understanding of the phenomena being explored and by facilitating events that allow them to create their own knowledge. During this cycle numerous intermittent participants from the previous action research cycle continued to return periodically. Other second action research cycle cohort members, such as Ninele, Sherry and Marlene, demonstrated consistent attendance and eventually showed an increased involvement with many of the special events of this term.

Of particular note was Marlene who, in addition to successfully completing her Master's of Education degree from the University of Alberta, was also hired as a Field Experience Associate. This meant that Marlene not only remained within the action research cohort, but also became a co-worker on campus. As such she co-chaired many of the action research sessions and co-organized the special events which occurred throughout the fourth and fifth action research cycles. With Marlene's input an advanced session schedule for the fourth cycle was produced so that prospective cohort members could join for either some or all of the posted sessions.

During the fourth cycle, from September to December 2000, many variations occurred -- cohorts began advocating for inclusion of new members, guests began to be scheduled in advance so their sessions could be publicized, a touchstone document was crafted and the possibility of a cooperating teacher conference was again revisited.

Advocating for Inclusion of New Membership

This advanced and well publicized scheduling proved to be very opportunistic, for it afforded existing cohort members the freedom to solicit their co-workers and acquaintances for additional participants. This avocation for inclusion within the cohort was evident during the CSI sponsored "Wine and Cheese" function in October of 2000, for despite *not asking* for podium time to promote the action research collective, six school coordinators -- all of whom were workplace associates of either Ninele, Sherry or Marlene -- sought the opportunity to inquire as to the specific dates and times of the first few action research meetings of the school year. Each of these potential participants, most noticeably Jackie, had heard of the action research cohort prior to coming to the Faculty Club. During this gathering Jackie, while new to the role of school coordinator and despite attending her first CSI function, took the opportunity to seek further information.

Another pleasing discovery during the start-up of this cycle was the number of one-time visiting cooperating teachers, who asked to be included in the group to hear the guest speakers or join topical discussions. These single session guests were either friends of the consistent cohort or cooperating teachers who had heard of the cohort's existence and wished to attend or had made inquiries after receiving information from Field Experience Associates or University Facilitators. While the response was encouraging and bolstered the confidence of many of the returning cohort, questions emerged both from within the cohort discussion and myself:

> 'Was word of mouth beginning to spread the message of the Action Research group?'
>
> 'Would the group get too large and lose some of the intimacy associated with the first few rounds?'

Another noticeable inclusion into the action research dynamic during this October, 2000 start-up was that Beth and Lynn, who had been associated with the pilot group and had taken a year off to pursue employer based leadership courses, both wished to reestablish themselves within the collective. Both women stated they had started a Master's of

Education degree at the University of Alberta and felt that the action research cohort may help them refine their study topic -- which at that time involved issues related to student teaching.

As a result of the increased solicitation and eventual accommodation of new or returning cohort members, the diversity which now existed within the group was powerful. While the preceeding rounds had been gratifying, the dichotomy of those with little or no experience with either the action research process or mentoring student teachers -- or both -- and those with varying degrees of experience of either, led to profound changes in group dynamics. Led by the core discussion group membership which now consisted of seven educators, all from varying locations, grades, and teaching/personal experience quotients, this allowed an infusion of new ideas, questions and comments into the discourse that was awe inspiring. Added to this consistent assembly was the element of continual change, courtesy of visiting members, whose presence allowed the action research cohort dialogue to take an eclectic detour. This twist would be immediately noticed in the type of questions posed, for often the inquiries dealt with materials and issues previously discussed. The recycled questions included the following concerns:

> How can collaboration among host schools improve the quality of whole school experiences for Student Teachers?
>
> How could the gaps be bridged between theory and practice, university and schools, and the academic disciplines and education?
>
> How can we build partnerships in which Cooperating Teachers, School Coordinators, student teachers and the University academics (and non-academic staff) work together?

Scheduling Guests

The richness of input from the cohort members was desirable, for it manifested itself in the subsequent actions of the cohort. One such accomplishment was the creation of a full term schedule for upcoming meetings. With a tentative fourth round schedule in hand, and spurred on by Marlene, Ninele and Sherry and their recollection of the knowledge created through the very successful practice initiated within the second action research

cycle, a second deliberate action of the cohort was the creation of a wish list of potential speakers. With a tentative schedule, contact was initiated with potential guest speakers from within the Faculty of Alberta (U of A). When scheduling the invited visitors, the cohort suggested that a pattern be established that observed at least one session spacing between each special session that would facilitate a debriefing period for the cohort members.

While conversing with the two requested guests, Drs. Joe Norris and Mark Yurick, both either suggested or were asked to forward whatever written work they had generated on the subject to which they would be speaking. With this request in place, the cohort began to observe a cadence which saw specific information for each guest distributed during the session before their arrival. This information, considered optional reading, was then made available to each cohort member in the hopes that it would be read before either guest spoke. Subsequent to the guest appearance cohort members had the opportunity to compare their understandings with that of others. Numerous participants commented favorably on the inclusion of intermittent guest speakers and optional readings.

Creating a Touchstone Document

Based on the knowledge provided by both Joe and Mark, a touchstone document was created within the cohort during this term. Built upon the Dr. Joe Norris' document of October 5, 2000 (see figure 12), it was observed that many cohort members continued to write session notes directly onto this condensed outline of Whole School Experiences.

Whole School Experiences

Beliefs

- Field Experience is more than *student* teacher
  - needs to be ... time to reflect, ... time to observe, ... time to plan, ... time to engage in professional conversations

- Learning from all members of the school community
  - make classroom students also responsible for student teachers.

Activities

- Shadowing *[gaining different perspective of what is a school]*
  - Cooperating Teacher, Principal, Students, Support staff

- Planning
  - Teach another's lesson plan
  - Have someone teach your plan
  - Read each other's plans - note style differences, comment on what was learned from the other plan (juxtaposition) *[what have I learned from reading this plan, based on this activity I plan on rewriting my lesson plan once I've taught it]*

- Observation
  - Observe a peer teach and provide feedback (cross discipline, *cross graded*)
  - Have a peer observe you teach and provide feedback
  - Feedback based upon anthropology
    - Observed/Opinion *['T' chart]*
    - Questions to Ask
    - Start/Stop/Continue Chart

- Interview Panels
  - Set up a panel of in-school students to give their opinion on what is a 'Good Teacher'
  - Have time with a diverse group of students to prepare for the panel
  - After students presentations moderate (ie talk show format)

- Presentations
  - Presentations to host schools staff members on teaching learned on campus
  - Cooperating teachers presented to student teachers

- Weekly Meetings
  - Hard to organize and get commitment
  - Once momentum gained, they do work
  - They do need structuring
  - "We're lucky, we get professional development once a week" common lament from cooperating teachers who have experienced the process of weekly discussions

Figure 13: Suggested Whole School Experiences - J. Norris (Oct. 5, 2000)

When Mark shared his doctoral research findings with the cohort on November 30, 2000, members were observed adding their personal notes to this document. It was also noted that concepts presented within this sheet or additional notes from subsequent discussions would often be referred to, acting as fuel for further discussion or questions:

> Was there a need for a permanent place where school coordinators/cooperating teachers could gather to communicate issues related to mentoring student teaching that addressed their concerns?
>
> Could these discussions lead to further, more detailed examinations of preservice teacher education issues at the graduate course level?

Cooperating Teacher Conference - Revised

The final achievement through deliberate action within the fourth action research cycle, was the escalating involvement of certain cohort members in both the previously established and increasingly concurrent Cooperating Teacher and APT Elementary Student Teachers 'Call Back' Conferences. The involvement of Beth, Jackie, Lynn, Ninele, Sherry, and in particular Marlene, leading up to and including the November 20th conferences speaks of the cohort's commitment to both preservice teacher education and the action research cohort. It also speaks to the philosophical place these cohort members were in, due in large part to the sense of community that had been established within the action research cohort which has been formed during the proceeding 14 months.

Specifically, while planning the APT 'Call Back' and searching for speakers to address student teacher concerns, I looked to the action research cohort members. The invitation to either speak with APT student teachers or invite them to call upon their teaching peers to help present sessions was offered to all members of the cohort. Marlene, Sherry and Lynn arranged for facilitators that would speak to such topics as 1) **Interview for a Teaching Position**, 2) **Portfolio Development** 3) **Substitute Teaching** and 4) understanding **Student Behaviour.**

Conversely, while scripting the increasingly popular 'Field Experience Conference for Site-Based Teacher Educators' conference, I relied heavily on the expertise and boundless energy of the six cohort members. With Marlene and I sharing co-planning responsibilities, the remaining five chose to make themselves available for additional meeting times to help format the continually-evolving conferences. The following program calender reveals that while many of the sessions were repeated from the first cooperating teacher conference held on November 9, 1999, additional sessions were added according to cohort discussion. Some of the cohort also experienced the first foray of going public (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999) by presenting information to their teaching peers with regard to issues related to supervising student teachers. An example of such would be Lynn discussing the **Role of a School Coordinator** and Sherry explaining why having an **IPT student is A Good Place to Start** becoming a mentor teacher.

Role of the School Coordinator
An overview of the critical role these people play within the Collaborative Schools Initiative will be provided.

FIRST TIME Cooperating Teaching
Listen to first time cooperating teachers share their experiences with regards to field experience expectations. Come with questions and/or suggestions.

Evaluation Writing
This focused conversation around the issues related to evaluation will increase the level of awareness and comfort for all those who compose these important documents.

The new LOOK of EDFX 200
Join a discussion about the initial field experience component of the B.ED program and provide significant contributions to the development of future teachers.

Dealing w/ Student Teachers at Risk
The challenging issue of dealing with resolution of interpersonal conflicts will be discussed and explored.

Cooperating Teacher's WEB site & Field Experience Staff Introductions
Who's answering the phone when you need a question answered? Meet the people who are there to help you work with student teachers. Discover how you can access and download information quickly and easily using the Web CT.

IPT Student ... A Good Place to Start
Strategies will be explored and discussed as well as helpful hints and best practices for working with two IPT student teachers.

Figure 14: Cooperating Teacher Conference - November 9, 1999

Fifth Action Research Cycle - Landmark Events

This final round had a series of landmark events that provided the cohort with the opportunity to explore both professional and, as the subsequent chapters of this document will attest, personal growth and development. In addition to six sessions over a four-month time period, three events within this time period proved to be both the culmination of the cohort's work and the impetus for further individual development and professional growth. Those milestones provided the opportunity for sustained and purposeful discussion which fueled both reflective and re-planning discourse. In chronological order these events are as follows: the revisitation of a student teacher forum, the cohort visit to yearly WestCAST conference in Calgary Alberta and the planning for and hosting of the now merged (as opposed to concurrent) Field Experience Conferences for Student Teachers and Site-Based Teacher Educators.

Student Teacher Forum - Revisited

The first event was the student teacher forum, first attempted during the pilot study. Having experienced the first forum as pilot round members, both Beth and Lynn immediately inquired as to the possibilities of hosting a similar event, for they felt the forum was, in Beth's words, "tremendously beneficial in helping to see what student teachers needed" (Beth, September 19, 2000). With their encouragement I electronically solicited a number of former student teachers whom I'd either instructed on campus or for whom I acted as a university facilitator to avail themselves for this event. The event was scheduled for a time that would still have them on campus and not interfere with their midterm exams. This timing was also advantageous for the cohort, for it allowed early access to additional ideas for program improvement. The timing must have been agreeable to most of the invited guests, who ranged from prospective education students to a recent graduate attending for the 90-minute afterschool on-campus session on January 16, 2001.

Each education student, student teacher or recent graduate sat interspersed among the cohort members and shared their personal and professional hopes for the future as well as

cohort members and shared their personal and professional hopes for the future as well as concerns for the program. Only once were they reminded that the research mandate of the cohort was to explore ways to make the field experience at each host school more impactful and not to question the protocol or decisions of the Faculty of Education. I not only observed numerous cohort members taking notes, I noted the tact many of the newer professionals demonstrated when relaying less than stellar field experiences.

In the days following the forum, I continued to receive apologies from invited former student teachers, who while expressing their regards and disappointment for not being able to attend, thanked me generously for the offer and volunteered lengthy and seriously considered opinions regarding their experiences.

Going Public at WestCAST

The second highly motivating event for the cohort was the opportunity to travel to Calgary for the the annual WestCAST conference. WestCAST, another acronym the group needed to master, is short for the Western Canadian Association for Student Teaching, a gathering of nearly 400 delegates from the four western provinces designed to explore undergraduate programming at each of the nearly 12 campuses represented. In attendance are academic staff, non academic staff, undergraduate students and, due in large part to the ATA, an increasing number of cooperating teachers and/or school coordinators interested in gathering more information about working with student teachers.

Early in the fourth cycle the entire cohort was informed of the conference and invited to apply for Professional Development funding to help defer costs. Beth, Jackie, Lynn, Marlene, Ninele and Sherry each approached me, and together we constructed a proposal for a session outlining the action research cohort's work with regards to the dissemination of timely and appropriate information to host schools, including an overview of the field experience conferences to date. We hoped our session would highlight the new knowledge created not only within the cohort but within the population of site-based teacher educators who attended. By scripting *our* session in this format the cohort was

> ... sharing the finding with other people, particularly colleagues in the work context, and checking with them whether your perceptions are reasonably fair and accurate. Going public is not something that should be left until the end of the project ... it is important to go public throughout an action research enquiry in order to check your own perceptions about outcomes and findings with other people. (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999, p. 27)

After receiving approval from the WestCAST organizing committee, each of the six cohort members made themselves available for additional time to formalize *our* session and its content. It was decided that a round table format would best suit the tone and texture, for we hoped to replicate the action research cohort meetings as much as possible.

Field Experience Conference - 3rd edition

The final action research cohort accomplishment of this cycle, which must be discussed within the context of both personal and professional contributions, occurred when the pronounced six took increased responsibility for hosting the third *Field Experience Conferences for Student Teachers and Site-Based Teacher Educators*. As with the two previously described Field Experience conferences, this gathering of both cooperating "mentor" teachers and/or school coordinators was held concurrently with a similar 'Call Back' conference for APT student teachers. This conference varied considerably from its predecessors, for it was consciously amalgamating with the student teacher conference to deliberately intermix the mentor teacher and student teacher populations. To this end a single, all encompassing program was created that featured over sixty sessions, some of which were repeated over the course of the day. While many of the sessions for this merged conference featured presentations for each audience, based on the expressed interest and written evaluations of both student teachers and cooperating teachers from previous conferences, others were deliberately ambiguous to encourage discussion among and between the participants.

For example, while **Interviewing for a Teaching Position** drew almost exclusively student teachers and **First Time Cooperating Teaching** was intended for mentor

teachers, other sessions such as **Coping with Behaviour Disorders**, **Team Building: A Teachers' Role in Implementing a School Wide Discipline Plan** and **Weekly Feedback Practices** were deliberately planned to appeal to both groups.

This CSI cosponsored event drew over 150 cooperating mentor teachers and/or school coordinators to the University of Alberta campus for a full day of information gathering and detail sharing plus another 400 APT elementary students. Because of the profound increase in attendance, the six cohort members and I chose to delineate some previously offered sessions between elementary and secondary specialties as well as create new sessions including:

Mentoring Beginning Teachers
Mentors play an active role in facilitating the transition of beginning teachers from the initial survival stage to the intermediate task stage to the final professional stage. This session will provide an overview of the mentoring process as well as outline the dimensions of mentoring, roles of mentors and protégés and necessary skills.

FIRST TIME Cooperating Teaching (Elementary)
Listen to first time cooperating teachers share their experiences with regards to field experience expectations. Come with questions and/or suggestions.

FIRST TIME Cooperating Teaching (Secondary)
Listen to first time cooperating teachers share their experiences with regards to field experience expectations. Come with questions and/or suggestions.

Midpoint Evaluations
This conversation will explore the process of critical self evaluation during the midpoint evaluation process.

Weekly Feedback Practices (Elementary)
Quality weekly feedback is imperative for the professional growth of the preservice teacher. Ideals and models of quality feedback will be explored and developed.

Weekly Feedback Practices (Secondary)
Quality weekly feedback is imperative for the professional growth of the preservice teacher. Ideals and models of quality feedback will be explored and developed.

Student Teachers make a Difference: Cooperating Teacher Stories
This workshop invites participants to share their stories of how student teachers make a difference to pupils, teachers, classrooms and/or schools during their student teaching experiences.

Graduate Studies
Thinking about graduate studies in elementary or secondary education? This session will answer your questions.

Figure 15: Field Experience Conference - March 2, 2001

Chapter Synopsis

This chapter included a detailed account of the trolling for participants process and a description of each discovery from the five distinctive cycles of the action research process. In the next chapter testimonials from the the six participants of the action research process provide insight into the personal and professional discoveries uncovered while in the midst of gathering information, producing understanding and eventually creating knowledge.

CHAPTER 5:

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

There are no, nor should there be, time lines associated with the improvement of classroom professional practice. There should, however, be a desire on the part of educators to continually seek opportunities for acquiring knowledge. The act of acquiring knowledge, while in the midst of action research, is personal and distinctive to each individual engaged in the discovery process. Each educator who took part in the discussions, either the eight participants or the six cohort members, walked away with different personal experience and therefore different professional knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Regardless of the amount of time invested within the action research process each participant or cohort member has a story to tell -- not only about the interfacing of theory and practice but also about the interactions of all those personal knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996b, April) stories.

They also have testimonials as to how all these personal stories created resources which, in turn, led to their being able to effect meaningful change in their professional practice with student teachers and their peers. The professional knowledge created within this action research process is unique because it is personal knowledge constructed in this particular living out of this action research project. According to Feldman & Atkin (1995) "[u]nique knowledge is generated by teachers in their own practice-based inquiries. The expectation is that teachers will improve their practice and come to a better understanding of their educational situation by doing [action research]" (p. 128).

The first section of this chapter, entitled "New Awareness and Cohort Growth," examines three practice-based themes that were regularly expressed by members of the action research cohort. These themes relate to concerns for gathering current programming knowledge and are as follows: 1) asking skillful questions about student teaching, 2) advancing professional practice through reflective dialogue and 3) personal talk about professional growth. Within each of these themes the participants were, as the research progressed, able to look for opportunities to employ their collective power as a

knowledge generating committee (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996) in order to create "knowing subjects committed to changing themselves and in doing so changing their educational work" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997, p. 44). To honour these recommendations for change, each subsection will include a "continually erased and redrawn" blueprint (Tom, 1997, p. 191) for change that was either supported or proposed by the action research cohort, the participants and those people with whom we worked.

The second section, entitled "The Gift of Composed Self Understanding," is a self-exploration and illustrates that "[a]ction research means finding out -- mainly about you -- in order to improve practice -- mainly yours" (p. 33). By employing "reflective" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997) skills I am comfortable sharing these self understandings, for, as Palmer (1998) advised,

> If I am willing to look in that mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge -- and knowing myself is as critical to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject (p. 2).

Within this section three themes are explored, including my role as host within a collective of peers, how old paradigms of educational leadership originally conflicted with the goals of action research and how, eventually, I grew to appreciate the importance of discussion.

New Awareness and Cohort Growth

The intent of this first section is both to strengthen the reputation of educational action research and to contribute to the existing knowledge base of the CSI by lending the combined voices from our community of co-researchers (Brennan & Noffke, 1997) or teacher/researchers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996) to the dialogue of school reform. The previously identified six cohort members and myself proposed sharing our experiences and information with the hopes of making them public, so that the results may be an advancement of learning for other stakeholders about field experiences. Sergiovanni (1994) encourages the development and nurturing of "[p]rofessional communities where

members make a commitment to the continuous development of their expertise and to the ideals of professional virtue" (p. 71). In this regard many of the cohort demonstrated such a commitment, for in many cases the persistent questions (Huberman, 1993, p. 3) asked or actions taken by the cohort members were the result of a shift in attitudes towards student teachers specifically or the overarching goals of field experience events within host schools in general.

This group reflective section will migrate to the pragmatic and has been divided into three sub-sections: asking skillful questions about student teaching, personal talk about professional growth and meaning making through reflective dialogue.

Asking Skillful Questions about Student Teaching

While "failing to frame meaningful questions confuses the process" (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 110), a skillfully posed question may set the stage for further action research discourse, deeper reflection into practices and the creation of new knowledge through unexpected data being discovered by cohort members. Brennan & Noffke (1997) advise that while harvesting data is important to any research, the act of creating knowledge can lead to a closeness among participants, for it "can provide the focus for developing the relationship of "coresearcher" among group participants" (p. 31). While many of the six cohort members expressed initial interest in the action research process in order to have their questions answered, they, like me, left the process having generated far more questions which they felt needed to be explored. According to their own testimonials, individually recorded and then transcribed at the conclusion of each action research cycle, they had become coresearchers. Perhaps encouraged by the power of inquiry within the cohort, Lynn stated that her newly acquired goal, within her own practice with student teachers, was to "create a situation where student teachers are encouraged to ask questions" (Lynn, May 22, 2001). This understanding of the importance of questioning was also discussed by Jackie, who during a one-on-one reflective discussion at the end of the fifth cycle, explored the importance of asking questions when she stated that she had generated a "list of questions for myself to answer" (Jackie, June 6, 2001).

Confusion Regarding Preservice Teacher Education

As quickly as the cohort's dialogue moved from laughter to historical self-reflection during the first few sessions, the group's demeanor then shifted to questioning established Faculty of Education (U of A) protocol with regards to both the field experience and undergraduate teacher education program expectations. With the entire University of Alberta's Bachelor of Education degree up for discussion, this proved to be a much wider and unwieldy topic of study than I had prepared for, and I was immediately daunted by the spectrum of the questions. De Pree (1989) highlights the need to embrace all questions, including the ones which make us uncomfortable in not knowing the immediate answer by maintaining, "[w]e do not grow by knowing all of the answers, but rather by living with the questions" (p. 58). The first of many questions that needed to be lived with were often those posed in the form of problems with a seemingly straightforward answer. Sherry typified these initial uncertainties when she asked the following lead off question,"How does the University of Alberta actually divvy the student [teachers] out [to their field placements]?" (Sherry, November 18, 1999).

In seeking an explanation for these 'how does' or 'what does' questions, Henderson (1992) highlights two types of obstacles in the form of problems. It is assumed that when asking questions, action research cohort members were attempting to discover meaning for problems being experienced in their practice with student teachers and/or cooperating teachers. Citing the research of Weizenbaum (1981), Henderson explains that bounded problems have relatively clear solutions which will present themselves as apparent even to teachers with different beliefs and habits. Henderson's notion of bounded problems opens up for me a question of bounded questions. I'm choosing to reframe Henderson's problem premise for it gave me the idea that the concerns from the cohort stemmed from unanswered questions from the problems they were facing.

It was also apparent that the participants were interested in what others within the group were doing at their particular host school sites, for once the personal introductions and self-disclosures were completed, the business quickly turned to sharing ideas for successful cooperating teacher -- student teacher relationships and whole school activities.

Ninele, new to the role of school coordinator, asked two pivotal questions on February 2, 2000, 'I think I know the University's role, but what is the cooperating teacher's role in this process?' and 'What is the University Facilitator supposed to do?'

Conversely, "unbounded problems" (Henderson, 1992) have answers that are far more complex and may occur when either information about a situation is incomplete and requires further investigation to resolve the circumstance or a solution to the experienced obstacle may not exist (p. 51). While Ninele's questions above proved to be immediately answerable, they did "arouse a lively curiosity" (Huberman, 1993, p. 3) that would act as an indicator for discussions to come. Over the course of the study, cohort members began to ask increasingly challenging questions and posed an increasingly disproportional number of unbounded problems, very few of which dealt with the school visits. Instead discussion would quickly get diverted and take in such field experience specific problems as:

- conflict resolution between student teacher and cooperating teachers
- conflict resolution between cooperating teachers and University Facilitators
- the evaluation of student teachers at each phase of the field experience program
- supervision and feedback practice for student teachers
- how to work effectively with University Facilitators
- working with at risk student teachers

Figure 16: Unbounded Cohort Problems

Deciphering the Faculty of Education (U of A) Lexicon

In addition to raising uncertainties regarding current or correct information from Faculty of Education or the Undergraduate Student Services office towards the host schools, the cohort spent a large amount of conversation time and energy deciphering the Faculty of Education (U of A) lexicon, particularly those course title abbreviations and field acronyms associated with field experience. In much the same way that the development of a "shared language" (Keanie, 2000) can unite and bond members together, a discordant

language can be a barrier to the production of deeper understanding. The proof that such an undefined language barrier between participants can be open to misinterpretation, and therefore misunderstanding, is highlighted in the following exchange between Marlene and two participants whose attendance in the meetings was intermittent. During a question and answer session within the first action research cycle the first participant member, a school coordinator for six years, revealed that she was unaware of the character of the Collaborative Schools Initiative with the following question, "And what is the ...CSI model?" (S.S., November 18, 1999).

Hearing this question in the form of a bounded question a second participant, whose experience within the CSI was limited to her first year, supported the uncertainty by uttering, "I'm glad someone asked that! I was going to ask the same thing" (L.PW., November 18, 1999).

Detecting this uncertainty from both intermittent participants, Marlene added the following statement, "Oh, the Collaborative School Initiative model" (Marlene, November 18, 1999).

With this definition clearly established the second participant then responded in exasperation, "Oh, okay. All the acronyms!!!" (L.PW., November 18, 1999).

When one considers that the participant asking the, 'what is the ... CSI model?' question had half a decade of experience within the CSI, plus a sterling reputation within Undergraduate Student Services for providing a comprehensive program for student teachers at her host school site, I paused and asked a further unbounded research question, 'Was the question asked because concepts latent within the CSI were not understood or were the participants of this discussion simply confused by the proliferation of acronyms?'

The seemingly different language spoken by those affiliated with the on-campus portion of the preservice teacher education process continued to be problematic, for with each new member who entered the group, a short lexicon lesson needed to occur. Stringer

(1996) speaks to this need to understand the esoteric jargon occasionally thrown about within a conversation when he states rather bluntly, "(a)cademics frequently speak in an idiom that mystifies practitioners and laypersons alike. In these instances understanding is limited and communication is faulty" (p. 30). Some acronyms employed by the Undergraduate Student Services that needed a detailed explanation within the first few sessions were as follows:

Acronym	Full Title	Description
U.F.	University Facilitator	• University representative in host schools during field experience rounds
F.E.A.	Field Experience Associate	• Seconded classroom teacher supervising or instructing student teachers
E.A.F.E.C	Edmonton Area Field Experience Committee	• steering cabinet to establish policy and procedures
EDFX 200	Introduction to the Profession of Teaching	• first field experience offered to undergraduates
EDPS 310	Issues in Classroom Management	• prerequisite course dealing with management theory and technique
IPT	Introductory Professional Term	• second field experience (4 weeks)
APT	Advanced Professional Term	• third field experience (9 weeks)
WestCAST	Western Canadian Association for Student Teaching	• yearly conference pertaining to student teaching issues
C.S.I.	Collaborative Schools Initiative (Collaborative Initiative Schools)	• U of A initiative sponsored by the ATA
A.T.A	Alberta Teachers' Association	• the professional organization for teachers in Alberta
S.C.	School Coordinator	• a person (usually a teacher) who assumes the responsibility for hosting student teachers in a host school

Figure 17: Faculty of Education (U of A) Lexicon

Fletcher (2000) acknowledges the rift in language understanding, but also alludes to a cultural discrepancy when she perpetuates the employment of an acronym as she states "(f)ew would deny there can be a difference of culture and of language between schools and HEI's [Higher Education Institutes]" (p. 40).

Once clear lexicon had been established within the group, it seemed that the next level of understanding could be achieved. However, as new members were continually being introduced, brief explanations were often undertaken to inform the new participants. Often subtle side bar discussions could be observed during discussions as experienced cohort members, wishing neither to ignore the newcomer or interrupt the discussion, would whisper the term definition to the unfamiliar participant. In this way each existing member was solidifying her understanding of the lexicon.

Belligerent Questions and Initial Cynicism

Once information had been gathered regarding the acronyms employed within the Faculty of Education (U of A), the cohort then began asking more direct, sometimes belligerent questions, questions that featured initial cynicism. The focus of these multiple queries ranged from the concerns for paying for parking[1] to the rationale behind the decisions regarding field experience programming. The comments highlighted within this subsection were based on first hand experiences or hearsay and professional folk tales passed on from staff member to staff member. The first example of this was an issue voiced by one of the participants regarding the practice of giving a notification of concern[2]. In her opening question this participant stated,

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[1] While "coming back to campus" (Ninele) would prove its advantages in providing professional growth and development for the action research cohort, it did raise other problematic concerns, primarily paying for parking. It would seem that while thrilled to be returning to the varsity setting for the first time in numerous years, many educators had forgotten about, or were not impressed with, the idea of paying $6.00 for parking on or near campus. This point was made abundantly clear as each cohort arrived for the first of many sessions held on campus.

[2] A notification of concern is an unofficial document (usually in the form of a letter) which is served to student teachers in the hopes of addressing concerns in their infancy. No record of the document is kept on file, however, it has been proven effective in allowing teacher candidates to understand the gravity of their situations.

> I would like to know why we need to either pass or fail people. Why isn't there something in the middle? Like something that says, "You're doing fine, but you need more time (S.S. November 4, 1999).

To which Sherry then suggested,

> Like a swimming lesson analogy, you haven't finished with this level yet! (Sherry, November 4, 1999)

The first cohort participant then continued her scrutiny of the undergraduate program with the following personal account,

> We've had a couple of situations over the years where that exact situation applied and so the only recourse was to fail the student and that became such an involved process with the University [of Alberta] coordinator, of course not wanting us to fail his student because it reflected poorly on him. Yet the student teacher was not ready to be issued his certificate. He needed to do [another field experience] for another nine weeks. It was only in the last week that he finally started learning what he was supposed to be learning, whereas before he was just defensive. (S.S. November 4, 1999)

Almost simultaneous to this concern was the criticism which has at its core the theory-practice rift. During a discussion in which concerns for the authenticity and involvement of academic staff in the process of preservice teacher education programming was raised, the following comment was made,

> That brings me to another pet peeve and that is ... we have all heard the story of the University professor that has been in the ivory tower for 20 years who hasn't set foot in the classroom for 20 years. People like that teaching future teachers and relating experiences that occurred twenty years ago. Or maybe they can cite the latest research study but is that the same as being in a classroom! That's part of the larger issue that education needs to look at. (S.D. March 1, 2000)

Requesting an Historical Overview of Preservice Teacher Education

Much like I needed both a clearer understanding of the historical account of general preservice teacher education programming and the rationale for specific choices within the Faculty of Education (U of A) system before commencing in my research, so too did the eight participants and six cohort members. In this way my evolution as a researcher was running parallel to the group needs for the same knowledge. Before we could move forward with the knowledge creation that the cohort was requesting, there needed to be an understanding of the historical rationale for current decisions within the Faculty of Education (U of A). Kemmis & McTaggart (1997) validate this observation and refer to this need to know the topography of the issue as a general "historical understanding" (p. 30), in which the incomplete information is filled in as best as possible and circumstances are resolved in a timely manner.

By being enrolled in a graduate course which explored the historical context of teacher education at the time, I was able to act as a conduit, passing newly acquired information to group members as I discovered it. In some cases, I entered into graduate class discussions carrying with me unresolved historical concerns discussed the previous week within the action research group. By relying on my emergent relationship with the members, including the intermittent participants and the consistently attending cohort members, I became a campus based research instrument. As they informed me of their information needs, I was able to search it out.

Informed Critiques and Commentary

Once the three components of understanding the historical context of preservice teacher education, appreciating the vernacular employed on campus and entertaining pointed criticism of the existing program had occurred, a richer form of critiquing and commentary began to emerge. As such, an invitation was extended to four members of the academic staff within the Faculty of Education (U of A) to join the group primarily to share their thoughts with regards to specific field experience questions. This pattern of issuing invitations to academic staff, all of whom were responsible for policy and direction for

some components of the field experience program, continued to develop on a rotational basis for it met with increasingly popular responses from the cohort members. Lynn commented that, "It [the action research discussions] gets us in touch with what's happening at the University of Alberta" (Lynn, March 1, 2000).

In addition to gaining valuable insight and information deemed valuable by the cohort members, what was also of value was the opportunity to "link back to Faculty [of Education, U of A]" (Sherry, January 30, 2001). Jackie also commented on the unity with campus programming and personnel that she felt after such sessions, "I appreciate bringing in other people from around campus, for us to meet. To have those connections happening is very valuable!" (Jackie, May 8, 2000). A more intermittent participant, who nine months previously had been harshly critical of the 'ivory tower', modified his approach to effecting change to include a more awareness-based collaborative approach:

> If you want to effect change, you must create some kind of awareness. I now realize that. So let's sit down and talk about the issues (S.D. June 11, 2001).

By endeavoring to have these perceived theory-practice rift perceptions addressed and challenged by facilitating meetings with people from the Faculty of Education (U of A) the opportunity for ongoing discourse between the Faculty of Education and representatives from its host schools was initiated. Perhaps the most telling endorsement regarding the liaisons through discourse established with campus personnel was provided by Sherry:

> We hear both the University [of Alberta] professors and the cooperating teachers say that they are in separate worlds. The more we can get the key groups together .... I mean after all we are serving the same clients. (Sherry, January 30, 2001)

Once the "link back to Faculty" (Sherry, January 30, 2001) had been established and the Undergraduate Student Services and Faculty of Education lexicons more fully understood, I sensed a shift in the timbre of the questions. Uncertainties that would have been

originally based on the caustic premise of "why can't the University..." evolved or were modified to include more informed critiques and knowledgeable commentary. Self reflection such as 'how can I", "what can I do" or "what can we do" became the cohort norm for questions. It is interesting to note that these critiques were equally distributed between outward analysis of the current undergraduate preservice teacher education program offered within the Faculty of Education (U of A) and an inward self reflective exploration of the program each individual cohort member was involved in at their own host school site. An example of both concerns was voiced succinctly by Jackie, "What are we doing about a consistency .... of [field] experience at our schools?" and "What is the University doing about it?" (Jackie, November 4, 1999).

Marlene, in her later role as CSI coordinator, not only spoke from a familiar knowledge base but also from a focal point where blame was not being laid. She spoke with the acquired knowledge of both an informed observer and co-researcher:

> The Collaborative Schools Initiative has lost its intent. It is not what it was intended to be! And that's not a good or bad thing, but they [host schools] are not all doing the same things. There are varying degrees of collaboration. (Marlene, December 12, 2000)

Sherry also expressed not only concern for consistency with regards to how many visits the four-week student teachers receive from the University Facilitator, but also a deepening understanding of the issues related to student teaching. Her concern was that because their identity is still forming, the Introductory Professional term student teachers should be afforded the opportunity to have more visits/observations from the University Facilitator:

> I'm being a little philosophical about this IPT. I think it is so important and yet it doesn't always appear to be important. One visit and we have chatted around this table before about how it almost is reversed. Shouldn't we be putting so much more into our IPT students where the APTs ... some of them are ready to go. (Sherry, April 11, 2001)

To which Marlene responded:

> Those numbers, that one visit [from the UF during the IPT] are a minimum and I guess that's where the UF's are reading that (Marlene, April 11, 2001).

Sherry then continued the discussion by qualifying her concerns for more University Facilitator visits, observations and feedback by tying in her newly acquired understanding of the entire undergraduate program within the Faculty of Education (U of A):

> I mean when a University Facilitator has 25 [student teachers to observe], I don't know how they would do more than that. I just think it is [more observations and feedback are] so important now that I've watched APT students that have struggled and I think we [somehow] have got it backwards. I look at that and think, if we really understood how important those IPT student visits were, how important that four week period of time is to their growth as a teacher. It's critical! I now see the wisdom in that four weeks before the EDEL courses. (Sherry, April 11, 2001)

Sherry then expressed awareness for students who did not partake in a whole school experience in their previous round and how it has obvious effects in subsequent field experience placements:

> The other thing is we talk about this whole school experience but I have observed it, or the lack of it, in APT students that struggle. They had been in one particular setting, but they didn't see the range of curriculum or grade levels. So when they went to their EDEL classes they didn't have an experience to [which to] apply the theory. (Sherry, April 11, 2001)

By providing us with this insight Sherry has demonstrated that the discussion regarding the intent and the purpose of the whole school experience has led to purposeful thinking and as such the discussion could be generating thoughts within other participants about their place in their schools. The interest of the group continually was stretched to include far reaching questions, and then shrink back to working with student teachers.

A strong recommendation from within the cohort was for the establishment of a permanent action research or focus group discussion "dwelling place" (Aoki, 1991), where School Coordinators or Cooperating Teachers not only could address issues of concern regarding the Faculty of Education undergraduate program expectations at specific sites but also, perhaps, mutually negotiate specific site programming. Stated simply, the intent of these discussions would be the implementation of 'whole school experiences' as they are established by existing Collaborative Initiative schools. School Coordinators/Cooperating Teachers could be invited to a series of afterschool meetings in which host school program concerns are discussed and field experience programming suggestions exchanged with the hopes that the process of organizing the most opportune field experience possible through the use of whole school activities could be enhanced through a process of reflection and sharing. During these sessions participants could co-plan these activities, refine their professional practices and then implement desired changes to specific host school programming. By reporting back on the successes and/or difficulties of these recently implemented experiences, all participants would then prove that certain components of the discourse were beneficial. In this way action research could be seen as being beneficial, for it would "help practitioners .. go beyond present constraints [to some extent at least] and to empower them to act more appropriately in the situation and more effectively as an educator" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997, p. 12).

Advancing Professional Practice through Reflective Dialogue

The cohort also explored the concerns related to teacher isolation and the desire to change this existing workplace climate. The next subsection examines how the sharing of ideas among the action research cohort members can break this isolationist mentality and can lead to meaning making as we live and work together in educational communities. The power of this focused dialogue within the cohort group will be illustrated and explained in a three-stage process. The first stage, entitled "taking suggestions," begins with the seeming need for the cohort to purge concerns and glean recommendations. The second stage, "exchanging ideas," draws attention to the increased understanding gained through a mutually supportive network. The third stage entitled "proposing ideals," describes the desire to dream of best case scenarios and the creation of ideal situations.

Taking Suggestions

The "current school culture that does not encourage teachers to observe one another in their classrooms" (Rowley, 1999, p. 5), has perpetuated a model which dictates that a teacher remain within the four walls of a classroom. This same organizational model seems to have encouraged a mentality in which classroom teachers feel detached from each other. Schuyler & Sitterley (1995) noted that often teachers lack encouragement to seek similar minded or mutually supportive peers. In their words, "there was no effort to bring them [teachers] together to seek solutions to commonly faced difficulties" (p. 45). This isolation was echoed in one participant's comment as she explained her teaching situation:

> I've been at this school my entire career, so whenever I have a chance to chat with other people, ... or to hear what they are doing, I love it! Because sometimes you kind of question what you are doing, especially doing everything yourself ... you kind of feel isolated from the world. (S.VB. May 8, 2000)

Fullan et al (1998) suggest that educational reforms, like the ones proposed within the Collaborative School Initiative, are stalled because informed, forward thinking educators interested in change are being kept "isolated [in small groups] from other educators in the school district -- thus the failure to achieve whole school or whole district reform" (p. 57). Whether it is referred to as networking, discussion groups, focus group meetings or simply chat sessions, each member had strong opinions about the isolation of teachers and the need to communicate with other cooperating teachers in preparation for, and/or during, field experience rounds. Beth supported and elaborated this sentiment by stating "[a]ny time you sit down and talk with people, you learn something! That's the power of dialogue" (Beth, May 15, 2001). Other researchers (Lambert, 1995), who have explored issues related to educational administration, support this form of "from-the-ground-up" educational reform by asserting, "[a]s adults, we need to be able to engage in processes of meaning-making as we live and work together in education communities if capacities for reciprocity are to be developed" (p. 34).

An example of the progress of meaning making when allowed or encouraged to work with others is provided by Jackie, as she explains her concerns for supervising a field experience program she felt ill prepared for in her former school, "Just the opportunity to talk about how to administer and organize the [CSI] program at a school site ... it has really impacted me a lot" (Jackie, March 13, 2001). Like many of the other cohort members, Sherry also expressed that her interest in the research group was first piqued by the thought of gaining new ideas for the field experience program she was responsible for implementing at her host school:

> I'm new as coordinator in our school and I thought there would be other ideas out there that I could see what was happening (Sherry, November 4, 1999).

Sherry's comment validated my recollections, for as I moved from the role of cooperating teacher to that of school coordinator, the complexity of the role was daunting. As such I asked, 'Were there other University Representatives (or for that matter classroom teachers) experiencing the same frustrations of not knowing what and why the Faculty of Education (U of A) was doing what it did?

To many participants in this study, the answer was a resounding, 'Yes!' for the reoccurring theme was one of being out-of-touch with the undergraduate program and of site-based preservice educators feeling isolated. Sherry expressed her frustration near the end of the action research study by stating:

> I would like, sort of a bank of ideas on what projects have been done. Like I said, we've been doing this for years and we have never done anything like the whole school project. I sort of feel like it would be helpful to give ... like you said, you went through the things that had been at the school before and then generated their own ideas. *It is really hard to work in a vacuum!!* (Sherry, April 12, 2000, speaker's emphasis).

An action research participant verified Sherry's comments regarding a lack of ideas by also stressing that they were motivated towards inclusion in the cohort group in order to collect ideas.

> ... I entered [the research group] thinking I could pick up some ideas for making our school experience even better for the student teachers. And I think I did get a lot of good ideas (S.S. April 27, 2000).

Regardless of how educators come together for discourse, Tom (1997) provides advice on group learning situations when he cautions that:

> The critical issue is whether group members believe they can learn from one another. It is possible for teacher educators to appreciate and build on one another's strengths, not dramatize internal differences (p. 190).

An example of scaffolding onto another person's idea was provided when Jackie testified as to the strength and vitality of the concepts discussed within the collective when she declared "I felt that, as far as knowledge went, I was gaining a lot of knowledge really quickly" (Jackie, June 6, 2001). Many of those present during discussions, both participants and cohort members, were routinely observed making notes and nodding their heads in agreement as fellow participants shared their stories of success or areas of concern. One participant noted, "I took notes during every class, on the suggestions that people came up with. And I noticed that everyone else took notes too!" (S.VB., May 8, 2000). While the expedience and frequency of the suggestions for site-based field experience program improvements was awe inspiring, it was also disconcerting. Perhaps the information exchange was flowing too quickly to be understood. Witnessing the note taking I asked the question, 'Was the process of meaning-making being undermined by the bombardment of suggested ideas?'

Exchanging Ideas

Mindful of perpetuating the 'how to teach' checklist mentality (Britzman, 1991; Chalmers, 1968; Chalmers, 1967; Goodman, 1986) which had "contributed to [the] deflection of attention away from children's learning and onto teachers' performances" (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. xi), I became cognizant that "[a] good idea becomes a fad when it is adopted and used at a level of practice without a change at the level of thinking" (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. xii). Just as I became aware of the need to

develop a richer analysis of the issues related to field experience programming within the Faculty of Education (University of Alberta) through questioning, a metamorphosis in group dynamics also occurred which saw a previously unexperienced energy develop -- and then radiate outward from within the consistent six cohort members. This calming synergy was first noticed when the membership seemed no longer content simply to snatch suggestions for field experience program improvements from each other. Instead ideas, or more specifically concerns or questions with regards to the growth of the teaching profession, would be floated into the group's discussion and allowed to settle gently into the dialogue. Zimmerman (1995) explains that, "[t]he art of asking open-ended questions that mediate meaning must be learned, practiced and refined" (p. 110). An example of the subtle shift in questioning occurred when participants and cohort members moved from asking questions such as ... , 'What activities do we do/for/with student teachers?' ... to concerns such as Beth's, 'We know that field experiences can be done better", "Why do we still do student teaching this way?", "What activities or experience would be best for student teachers?" and "What experiences would student teachers need to familiarize themselves with the host school and the profession?" (Beth, May 15, 2001).

Other questions posed during this time were far more global in nature, a reflection of the depth in understanding with which the cohort eventually functioned, as evidenced by the questions Ninele, Lynn and Marlene posed during our WestCAST presentation,

> What does partnership between the ATA and the Faculty of Education really mean? (Ninele, February 22, 2001).
>
> What type of teacher do we [either society or the profession itself] want? (Lynn, February 22, 2001).
>
> How do we teach people to be good teachers and how do we do it when there are so many teacher candidates? (Marlene, February 22, 2001).

In what follows Sherry retraced her involvement with the cohort, as well as the impact the group discourse had had within her practice with teacher candidates. However, a closer look inside Sherry's statement also provides further evidence of this migration towards exchanging ideas and verbalizes an inextricable shift towards the examination of

why certain personal and professional behaviours were employed when working with student teachers.

> I've only had student teachers probably the last two or three years but I found, like you said [nodding to another group member], working with student teachers really helped me focus on *what* I was doing, and *why* I was doing it! (Sherry, May 5, 2000, speaker emphasis)

As the sessions progressed and the cohort membership changed and increased in number, discussions continued to branch out and were enriched by a sense of reciprocity amongst those members who chose to remain in the process[3]. Open-ended questioning that led to uncertainty and further exploration, instead of looking for easy answers, became the discussion norm. One example was when Beth voiced a concern that struck at the very core of the cohort's emerging mandate, 'How do you build communication amongst schools?' (Beth, May 15, 2001).

This call for a communication link between the members of the action research community was addressed during the ensuing sessions. The request for a phone number and e-mail list of cohort members was first detected as a result of the succession of the "what, how, why" questions that began to emerge almost immediately. The establishment of this list not only allowed for the implementation of new ideas via a mutually agreed upon communication network, it also provided the potential for new ideas to be followed up directly between the cohort members themselves. While the use of this contact list can be questioned for there is no way of knowing how frequently it was employed, what should not be questioned is that its development and subsequent sharing was a security line between the cohort members which instilled a sense of freedom to explore possibilities and implied that cohort members knew they had support if necessary. Each person made reference to networking in helping with the creation of a new awareness in the area of field experiences for teacher candidates that might work

[3] This is an important distinction to make, for some original members many have been content to arrive at the first few meetings, receive new ideas of Collaborative School Initiative program suggestions for improvement and then exit. Those cohort members who chose to remain continued to develop a communal exchange mindset during their discussions to the point where my comments were noticeably absent from the transcripts.

within the specific context of the host school. For example, if a cohort member heard another member of the cohort speaking about an idea, the first person could contact the second person directly to discuss details of the concept perhaps not fully understood during the session. Marlene, in drawing attention to the act of communicating with peers, also addressed the heightened morale and bolstered confidence associated with coming to the cohort:

> Talking about things like that [facilitating student teachers at one's host school] it just boosts us up and makes us realize that we are doing a great job. It made me realize how much more we have to do, should be doing, to network with people. (Marlene, May 4, 2000)

Lynn, in the following statement, acknowledged the importance of gleaning ideas for best practices.[4] In the second half of her statement she also draws attention to the need for the opportunity to discuss issues:

> I think that the value of being able to meet with other people that are either school coordinators or very interested in student teaching [is that] it gave an opportunity to share dialogue about the things that were working well in our schools. So we had a whole range of "best practices" to listen to and think, 'I could incorporate some components of this into my program.'
>
> But it also gave us an opportunity to talk about issues that are pertinent in our schools, whether it's evaluation or how do you fit in this school project. (Lynn, May 22, 2001)

Fletcher (2000) addresses the concern of building links through relationship building when she states, "it is through collaboration that there can be growth in understanding and a bridging through communication" (p. 40). The creation of dialogue lanes modeled as a relationship building tool within the cohort heightened the appreciation for the power of dialogue. Perhaps this is why many of the educators associated with this research continued to drive across town, often through cold and dark prairie winters, to seek the

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[4] A term used extensively in her school board for sharing proven successful classroom practices.

opportunity to discuss ideas and share stories, despite the onerous afterschool time commitment. As one who needed to log the most miles to come to the afterschool sessions, this participants's testimonial is most genuine:

> I feel that being a part of that group has just been so tremendous. I have really appreciated the networking, the contacts, just the ideas. I'm very excited about coming to the table to share ideas. That was very positive, I would really like to be a part of something in the future as well. (L.PW., May 8, 2000)

While networking was appreciated by the membership, another advantage was the opportunity to discuss educational issues with educators from outside the typical frame of reference afforded by one's school jurisdictions. Because the action research cohort eventually consisted of members from four local school boards, a diversity of opinion and local concerns were consistently voiced. Marlene reflected on the advice the diversity of group members were able to bring to the discussions:

> It made me realize how much more we have to do, or should be doing to network with people. Not only in our districts, both outside our district as well. (Marlene, May 4, 2000)

Another participant also repeated the impact networking with preservice teacher educators from outside his district had on his professional practice:

> The networking was most important. We can talk about what happened here, we can talk about what happens overall, but I've talked with teachers from three different school boards and have found out that we're not that different. (S.D., June 11, 2001)

Many cohort members expressed an appreciation for the contact made with invited guests from both the academic and support staff within the Faculty of Education and Undergraduate Student Services. As a result of these discussions and meeting field experience decision makers from the U of A, many cohort members expressed being made more aware of who to contact with informational needs. Lynn commented on the need to stay attached to the current thinking on campus as well as the current action employed in

host schools when she stated at the end of the study, "[k]eep current on what other changes are taking place [on campus] and not lose that network, that connection" (Lynn, May 22, 2001). This form of collegial collaboration and connectedness between the Faculty of Education and its multiple host schools finds support from such researchers such as Fullan, Galluzzo, Morris and Watson when they suggests, "[t]he most frequent suggestion was to *increase* the emphasis on *networking* and learning from the experiences of other schools and colleges of education and Professional Development schools" (Fullen et al, 1998, p. 45, emphasis added).

Perhaps the most poignant comment with regards to information gathering, idea sharing, and knowledge building was generated when Sherry was asked to reflect on what she felt was the most important component of the cohort group dialogue:

> You come from a group like this and you have a benefit of ideas from different sites and faculty coming in. You learn marvelous things from these meetings. (Sherry, March 13, 2001)

It should be noted that in order for this discourse to be effective, it need not always be courtly -- like those previously mentioned aligned social engagements at the Faculty Club. During many dialogical exchanges within each session, difficult concepts or questions were discussed with a frankness and candor associated with equal partners. An example of such an unscripted yet still civil discourse between two participants must be highlighted. One participant was a sessional guest who was a Faculty of Education staff member, and a cohort member who had earlier questioned the authenticity of longtime "ivory tower" professors instructing future teachers. During this exchange regarding the non-evaluative responsibility of the University Facilitator, the cohort member questioned how some student teachers may interpret this person's role and their ability to provide authoritative feedback. Acting on behalf of a student teacher speaking to the University Facilitator, this action research participant was quoted as saying., "You're not writing my evaluation, so why should I bother to listen to you?" (S.D. October 5, 2000).

Hearing this question, the invited academic staff member paused and then posed the response that not only addressed the immediate concern of the person asking the

questions but also fueled a tremendous amount of debate-like discussion for the subsequent sessions to come:

> But the reciprocal is also true. *Because* you're not writing an evaluation, I *can* talk to you, ... but talk to you in a different sort of way ...!
> (J. Norris, October 5, 2000, speaker's emphasis).

This discourse is pivotal, for the same cohort member who had earlier questioned the ability of academic staff was now able to engage in meaning making (Lambert, 1995, p. 34) regarding field experience with a representative of the same academic staff he earlier discounted. Perhaps this was possible because the differences or misunderstanding this person had been feeling towards Faculty of Education personnel had been addressed and talked through earlier in the action research process. This point, therefore, leads to another, equally important question, 'How do you build honest communication between host schools and the Faculty of Education?'

Proposing Ideals through Knowledgeable Activity

As the cohort progressed from taking each other's good suggestions and proceeded past exchanging ideas, they migrated towards a place where each member proposed ideals based on the knowledge they acquired through the action research process. It, therefore, became obvious that this resulting document must not only recognize by name the consistent six cohort members, but it must also acknowledge the increasingly public work and commitment to change -- in their classrooms, within host schools, entire districts and professional organizations that the cohort eventually, and then continually, strove for. Marlene personalized this notion by stating emphatically

> [t]his has excited me to go back now and take these ideas to my district and let them know that, yes, there can be things happening out there (Marlene, March 13, 2001).

I refer to three CSI co-sponsored conferences for cooperating teachers[5] (November 9, 1999; November 20, 2000 & March 2, 2001) and the cohort's trip to WestCAST in Calgary, Alberta (February, 2, 2001). Noffke (1995) supports this notion of taking research from the private place and making it obvious with the following statement, "[a]ction research must not be seen as only a staff development strategy; it must also serve as a means to make public the understanding of practitioners and the context in which they work" (p. 7). By using the words "research" and "we" in the following statement, Sherry not only personalizes the process she engaged in, but she also alludes to the the intense pride of being a part of a teacher/researcher committee and creating change by doing something:

> The thing that sort of has impressed me through the past couple of years is the power of Action Research ... I'm learning here. We're creating [a] research base, what we are doing here is valid (Sherry, March 13, 2001).

Sherry confirmed the words of Lewin when he cautions that "[r]esearch that produces nothing but books will not suffice" (Carson, 1998a. Fall). The opportunity to create research that produced something other than books, and for busy teachers perhaps something more important than books, presented itself on numerous occasions throughout the five cycles of this action research process.

While in the initial planning stages, I thought of the concerns and questions being generated within the action research discussions. The overarching concern voiced from within the group was that site-based preservice teacher educators do not have a place to discuss their role. Teacher isolation, discussed previously, was perpetuated, to a lesser degree, within the role of cooperating teacher and, to a greater extent, with school coordinators. Lack of opportunities for discussion, about the rationale for the current undergraduate program, lead to perpetuating dated practices. If the action research

[5] This one-day conference-like event had traditionally been planned to occur approximately half way through the nine week field experience and was intended to address both the emergent needs typical to teacher candidates involved in their concluding field experience and to provide these same novice professionals the opportunity to reflect on classroom practices within an academic environment. The format of this campus-based symposium usually features four, one-hour sessions interrupted by three intermissions, two 15-minute breaks and an extended one-hour lunchtime opening.

cohort's discourse could be made public, it was argued by the cohort, then the dated practices could be adjusted. These understandings of student teaching led the action research cohort to ask further questions:

> Who can school-based preservice teacher educators talk to with regards to questions and concerns about field experience expectations? (Ninele, May 3, 2000)
>
> Where can school-based preservice teacher educators get the field experience programming information they feel they need? (Marlene May 4, 2000)
>
> What information do school-based preservice teacher educators need? (Stephen, June 6, 2001)
>
> Do school coordinators understand the philosophical underpinning of the Collaborative Schools Initiative? (Beth, May 15, 2001)
>
> Are school coordinators receiving the information they require to implement the six goals within their host school site? (Lynn, May 22, 200)
>
> Where can cooperating teachers go to discuss concerns about their role? (Jackie, June 11, 2001)

After receiving funding from both the Faculty of Education (U of A) and the Alberta Teachers' Association, the planning of sessions and the lining up of speakers began in earnest. In locating presenters I looked to the cohort, for very early in the planning process it became obvious that the members of the cohort should be asked to share their newly constructed knowledge. The result of the first conference was overwhelmingly positive with many of the 50 guests sharing positive comments such as:

- This is a wonderful idea. I have had student teachers for 20 years but I learned lots today talking to other teachers and listening to presentations. Thank you!

- It rekindled an interest in working with student teachers.

A third guest mentioned that the sessions, and the conference was helpful in that it allowed for the opportunity to:

> • ... talk to other cooperating teachers, share stories, and find out what's happening in other schools and at the University of Alberta.

Another reward which became evident was exhibited by an intermittent participant who shared the following post-conference observation:

> I found that since the conference three of the cooperating teachers [within our host school] have come to me with their evaluations to get input, and I was able to relay some of the things that were discussed in the session I attended. Things like being really specific and about making sure that the cooperating teachers mention an area of growth. (S.S. November 18, 1999)

While the action generated with planning and pulling off a total of three increasingly well-attended campus conferences was awe inspiring, equally impressive were the subtle changes within the cohort members who chose to become involved. Re-planning for the second site-based preservice teacher educator conference, November 20, 2000 began immediately. Lynn, Beth, Ninele and Sherry volunteered to lead sessions and became increasingly active in the programming and organization. Tom (1997) suggested that for family-style group endeavours to be effective, not only must the dialogue be "shared yet searching and the contribution of all must be valued ..... the group must have the sense that its work is perpetually in the process of creation" (p. 192). In this way the action research process began to feed itself, spawning multiple reflective practitioners who were also researchers, who were also accessing teaching peers to either speak at the conference or come to attend. Greenwood & Levin (1998) cite Ryle's (1949) philosophical analysis

> that intelligence is more manifest in the way we *act* than in the way we think. Knowing *how* is manifest in intelligent actions that apply whatever capacities and knowledge a person has: it emerges through the application of knowledge in a given context. The definition of competence and experience is knowing *how* to do something appropriately (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 100, emphasis added).

Members of the cohort demonstrated intelligent action by carefully listening for subtle clues that could be addressed in additional sessions in subsequent conferences. In the planning process, the site-based preservice teacher education conference began to be referred to as 'our' conference by those most intimately involved.

Other cohort members spoke of this endeavour as being highly rewarding and professionally stimulating. Lynn verbalized "[f]or me it's been great professional development and I've had lots of opportunity either speaking at 'call back' conferences for APT students or to school coordinators" (Lynn, May 22, 2001). Sherry also supported the work being carried out by the action research cohort, for it increased the opportunity for meaningful discourse among interested parties from various schools.

> You don't often get this kind of discussion going on. How many people really want to sit down and talk about student teachers like we do here? So just the power of coming together with other like minded people is really encouraging. (Sherry, May 16, 2001)

Another example of a personal and professional shift occurred within Ninele. When first approached to lead a session, Ninele balked. Eventually, however, and with the encouragement of the action research collective, she agreed. Once committed to the topic of her choice, Ninele set forth to plan, finding additional times in her week to meet and plan with her co-presenter. During these pre-planning sessions, Ninele proposed jettisoning the didactic format chosen by many of the less effective presenters and chose instead to replicate the discussion atmosphere that was attempted at each action research session. Ninele seemed to understand intuitively not only the dialogue process but the progress her discussion group was making as well:

> I was more organized but I also suggested [to my co-presenter that] we present in a circle, ... we gave people opportunities to participate and it all kind of flowed. (Ninele, March 13, 2001)

Ninele moved with confidence towards and within the session. She desired to recreate an environment for meaningful discourse among those in attendance and to validate their participation in the information gathering process. In addition to the active excitement of

hosting numerous conferences for cooperating teachers and school coordinators, the six cohort members also attended the annual West Canadian Association of Student Teaching [WestCAST] conference.

Having attended for the first time in February 1999 and being suitably impressed with the conference, I began to speculate as to the potential for the cohort to attend subsequent WestCAST conferences. Once I was made aware of the potential funding, I made available the offer to attend WestCAST during the second action research cycle. Marlene took advantage of the additional funding and attended the conference held in Regina, winter, 2000. However, not all members of the cohort did so. The following comments reflect Ninele's concern at the time for her place in the process.

> I remember you talking about WestCAST last year [February 2000] and thinking, 'Oh no! I wouldn't belong there!' (Ninele, March 13, 2001).

Upon returning to the cohort, both Marlene and I shared our newly created awareness of issues related to student teaching and field experience. Perhaps encouraged by our excitement, other members of the cohort then began considering the possibility of attending and presenting a session at the next conference. The following year, winter, 2001, Beth, Jackie, Lynn, Marlene, Ninele and Sherry all requested and received funding[6] to attend and present numerous sessions. In the weeks preceding the Calgary WestCAST, the six cohort members and I outlined our sessions' key concepts. While mindful not to script the entire session, each participant seemed to feel more comfortable with the process once a framework had been established. While we intended to highlight the work of our action research cohort within the context of the "call back conference" hosted by the Faculty of Education (U of A), we spent 90 engaging minutes interspersed with our guests, around a large conference table-like setting comparing and contrasting undergraduate programs with our visitors, many of whom were either Deans of Education

[6] It should be noted that funding for the conference required teachers to not only cover the cost of the travel to the location and the conference registration fees themselves, but also required that substitution cost also be covered. In Edmonton substitute costs, per diem, are now reaching $200.00. The teachers obtained this funding from the Alberta Teachers' Association by submitting their request to the Faculty of Education.

or Associate Deans responsible for field experiences at their respective universities or colleges.

The session at Calgary was the highlight of not only the WestCAST experience but of the research cycles for that academic year. Jackie was delighted with what she learned, for it renewed her interest in student teaching issues as evidenced in the following comment, "WestCAST uncovered passions about student teaching that I didn't know I had, or I had once and had lost" (Jackie, June 6, 2001). Beth too provided testimony to the importance she placed on attending this conference for the sheer volume of ideas and information gained, "It's great to hear ideas from other campuses. It's very valuable" (Beth, May 15, 2001).

While the information and ideas from other Faculties of Education throughout western Canada were indeed valuable, I was equally appreciative of the awareness that was generated within the cohort in regards to our roles as site-based teacher educators. WestCAST provided an opportunity for the cohort to develop a rich collaborative experience while becoming theorists and articulating their intentions (Goswami and Stillman, 1987).

The action research cohort also received funding to travel to WestCAST 2002 in Vancouver. While some of the six members were not able to attend the Vancouver WestCAST, other newer members hosted an extended round table format session.

Another recommendation to be generated from within the cohort was for the continuation of the Site-Based Teacher Educator Conference. The establishment of an annual conference allowed for current information to be disseminated to site-based preservice teacher educators, and continued to close the perceived rift between theory and practice, between the campus and the host schools. During these sessions conference participants, including school coordinators and cooperating teachers, found a place to co-plan activities, refine professional practices and implement desired changes to specific site programming. By inviting back to campus those people responsible for implementing host school programming, these school personnel could then also access professional libraries and

academic staff, thus enhancing the professional practices of themselves and those around them.

Personal Talk about Professional Growth

The third theme of creating new awareness was on noting the professional growth within each cohort member. These discussions occurred as cohort members began sharing personal stories of personal and/or professional development issues, concerns or goals through the reflective process afforded by the action research process. While Lucas (1999) suggested that "[r]eflection is an important component of professional development" (p, 46), these depictions of uncertainty differed from those previously discussed, for they dealt with more than typical concerns about interacting with student teachers. While a number of cohort members spoke of facilitating student teachers as a professional responsibility, the following words are an example of how many members felt the action research sessions had also impacted the quality of their teaching practice:

> I don't just view taking student teachers as a professional obligation, which I think more teachers should. I also see this as a perfect learning opportunity. I don't have time, or the means, to keep up with the latest research. Not to the extent I would like to. So ... where do I go to get the latest research?
>
> Here! [the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta]. That's my best resource, the student teachers. (S.D., February 2, 2000)

This participant not only addressed the professional obligation he felt towards working with student teachers, he also acknowledged the importance of new knowledge coming towards him in the form of a student teacher from the Faculty of Education. Fletcher (2000) speaks to this professional growth when she asserts, "[h]aving the opportunity to work with a beginning teacher is a privilege and can give insight into how adults and pupils learn and the nature of their preferred learning styles" (p. 39).

Reflection can give a tremendous opportunity for deeper professional and personal insight. An example of such eloquent intimate contemplation is provided by Lynn as she

communicates on the importance she placed in the cohort meetings and the discussion process.

> Because we're all keenly interested [in student teaching] I looked at taking the next opportunity to enhance my learning. To feel more confident in taking the next step and to know that you have that support network, which I think was important because there's not a workshop that one can go to learn how to be, or the skills needed for school coordinators. So this was an ideal situation where you now have a group of people that you know you can call upon and *feel quite comfortable* that they would be acceptable to respond or send you in another direction to get that advice. (Lynn, May 22, 2001, speaker's emphasis)

In stating her comfort within the group, Lynn verbalized many of the successful elements of the cohort that I too felt were apparent. While I am convinced that my professional practice was heightened by inclusion within the group, comments such as Lynn's "ideal situation" only strengthen observations by action researchers such as McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1996) when they state, "[a]ction research, in a sense, is insider research, and every action researcher engages in a form of professional development (p. 11). However a cautionary note is also sounded by action researchers such as Kemmis & McTaggart (1997) when they state,"[n]ew ideas are not enough to generate better education. They must be accompanied by the development of better forms of discourse which describe, explain and justify the new practices more adequately" (p. 34).

To explain how new practices were instilled because of, or through, action research discourse, it is necessary to highlight the insight each cohort member felt they had created. To help illustrate this professional development each cohort member shared a brief testimonial as to their deliberately constructed, solution oriented (Boomer, 1987) professional change resulting from the action research process.

Beth The action research cohort made me become more of an advocate for classroom teachers to become cooperating teachers in terms of their own professional growth. I now appreciate that more of my energy needs to be directed towards helping cooperating teachers too see how important their role is in sustaining, and then expanding, the profession. One idea breeds another when there is conversation between peers. (Beth, February 13, 2003)

Jackie The group we had was awesome, there was lots of humour here. I learned so much from each member of the cohort. I would like to visit each person in their school. A flexible, adaptable team approach to acquiring more knowledge and creating a new network was very helpful. I learned who I could go to if I had questions about working with a student teacher. There was so much good information and ideas being shared. Some of my notes included further questions, especially when there was a guest speaker. (June, 6, 2001)

Lynn Before my involvement with this action research cohort I had some previous experience with working with student teachers but had not had any in a number of years. Nor had I any experience with action research. Our school had just entered the CSI initiative and I was sharing the position of the school coordinator with another colleague.

But now that I've had this experience I am a stronger advocate for encouraging teachers to accept student teachers into their classrooms and see it as a professional responsibility for each of us. It increased my awareness of the challenges facing new cooperating teachers and how better to support both them and student teachers in the school. The conversation with colleagues was most valuable and provided new ideas on how to support all stakeholders in the field experience program. My network of collegial support was expanded and provided opportunities to interact with teachers with the same passion for working with novice teachers. (Lynn, February 20, 2003)

Marlene I realized the there is still so much to learn from other people. That you are not stuck in the boarders of a classroom. There are many things to try to create solutions to situations we find ourselves in. (Marlene, February 13, 2003)

Ninele I wasn't so much ready for a professional change but a fostering of professional growth. There was an encouragement to try new things, even when that thing wasn't as successful as hoped for. The attempt was, none the less, worthwhile. Even the non-successes were respected within the cohort. (Ninele, February 13, 2003)

Sherry I can see this process working for staff professional development. I understand that this project is something that the University (of Alberta) would like to see in all their CSI schools. (November 2, 2000)

Figure 18: Professional Change Testimonials

Now that the voice of each cohort member has been shared it is time to explore in greater detail the changes they felt they had incurred. The following four subsections -- Enhanced Classroom Teaching, Future Leadership Roles, Interest in the Role of Field Experience Associate, and Further Graduate Education -- all explore recurrent themes which presented themselves over the course of the study.

Enhanced Classroom Teaching

One of the most surprising findings around professional development was that many group members openly shared as to the impact the action research dialogue had had on their practice as classroom teachers. While I had hoped for, perhaps even expected, impact statements regarding improved practice while supervising or working with student teachers, I was surprised to observe the dialogue regarding classroom teaching stories which emerged from the cohort. One participant, a school coordinator and vice principal responsible for staff well-being and professional development, articulated, then explained the influence student teachers were having within the staff she supervised:

> I've found that student teachers are real facilitators of our own teachers' professional development, because I see our teachers becoming better at their craft because they've had to teach it to a student teacher. (S. S. November 4, 1999)

Lynn articulates how the cohort discourse improved not only her professional practice while working with student teachers but also increased the quality of the learning experiences she was able to provide her grade school students:

> It [the action research discussions] gave, I think, all of us some new energy and the opportunity to look at, and reflect on, our own classroom practices. I think you get away from that when you've been teaching for a long time. When you have to actually sit down and explain it and look at it more carefully, and thinking of a rationale, 'Why am I doing this?' Then to be able to share that with student teachers. It's an exciting opportunity and a new focus for me as well. (Lynn, May 22, 2001)

The unanimous feeling that student teachers facilitate professional growth served as another reminder of the important role student teachers provide in classrooms, and in the host schools. Members spoke of their confidence that the act of mentoring student teachers was, in fact, assisting them as classroom teachers by causing them to "re-think their classroom practice and teach differently as a result of the protégés' ideas" (Wollman-Bonilla, 1997, p. 50). Sherry shared a reflection at the conclusion of the third cycle in May of 2000 that demonstrated her sincere commitment to her profession and her professional development:

> It's been really good for me to examine what I do. So that has changed the way I teach. Not every day am I able to do that, but I'm looking ahead and when I sit down to re-look at a unit I'm thinking, 'Okay. Let's look for these things that will make it more interesting.'
>
> So I really have, I have changed the way I teach because of this group. It's made me more conscious of good teaching practice. It's become very professionally important for me. (Sherry, May 5, 2000)

As Sherry's words demonstrate, there is a sincerity to learn with and from student teachers during their field experience, an idea reflected in Fletcher's (2000) statements:

> Seeing the novice explore and experiment with new teaching strategies can inspire and refocus expert teachers. As a result some decide to produce better teaching resources to use -- there are exciting opportunities for publication. Others develop their school role and successfully take over responsibilities for staff development. (p. 40)

Along with the testimonials regarding how the action research discourse improved their classroom practice, the cohort members also shared specific examples of how they were moved to a different place in their teaching by appraising their classroom exercise during field experience rounds. When asked to reflect on her practice, Ninele stated,

> [e]ven if you are a little bit tired that day, to make sure that you are showing off your best from time to time. So [having student teachers] keeps you on your toes. Even though I love teaching and I do lots of stuff, having the student teachers come in makes me evaluate what I'm doing.

> Even the different situations I had, caused me to look at my practice. Even to break it down and analyze them. (Ninele, May 3, 2000)

While the analysis of techniques proved to be professionally powerful for many of the cooperating teachers and school coordinators within the cohort, I needed to pause and question whether this heightening of personal and professional expectations was healthy for the student teachers. By asking if elevating classroom teacher performances for student teachers perpetuate the apprenticeship model or portray a false sense of what teaching is all about, I also asked what is real in a classroom and what images of classroom life the profession wishes to portray to our next generation of teacher candidates. With the "lofty classroom practice" question on the table, many members began sharing stories of being truthful with themselves and admitting to their student teachers that they did not have all the solutions for problems or concerns that presented themselves in the classroom. Perhaps this is where migration away from the apprenticeship model of teacher education (Brooks and Sikes, 1997) is best observed, for the cooperating teacher is open to the idea of not only educating the novice teacher but also learning alongside the student teacher and, in many cases highlighted by the cohort, actually learning from the student teacher. One participant demonstrated this openness to professional enrichment by sharing the following story. 'Normally' on the first day of the field experience, he would announce his intent of being a learner as well as a mentor to his student teacher:

> I also, whenever I meet my student teachers, I've only ever had four week student teachers, I tell them,
> 'You are going to learn a lot in the next four weeks, but I expect to learn as much from you, as you learn from me' (S.D., November 14, 1999).

Listening to student teachers promotes learning from them as well. Learning with student teachers also was enhanced when questions were encouraged and mutually shared. This same participant reflected on his own mentoring style when he actively encourages his student teachers to inquire about the knowledge he has gained of his personal and professional practice.

> Very often just the way they [student teachers] ask questions, 'Why do you do this a certain way, the way you do?'
>
> It makes me reflect upon my own practice and that's a good question, 'Why do I do this?' or 'Could I do this a different way to address their learning needs in some other way?' (S.D, November 14, 1999)

This testimony is supported by Wollman-Bonilla (1997) when she suggests that "protégés may introduce mentors to new views on curriculum and instruction and encourage them to try new teaching approaches and materials" (p. 50). Sherry repeated this sentiment with an illustration of a student teacher who, in searching for a hands-on math manipulative to demonstrate arrays, allowed her to create new awareness.

> It's [supervising student teachers] been really good for me to examine what I do. I had a student teacher a couple of years back who was teaching a math concept on multiplication. The idea of an array, and he said, 'I need to find a really interesting way to introduce this'.
>
> I looked at him and a thought, 'Like what!!' I was just as stuck as he was, and didn't know what to suggest. (Sherry, May 5, 2000)

It seems that the student teacher had left for home that evening still seeking an effective means of introducing the concept. Upon arriving at school the next morning, Sherry noticed him enter the classroom with a large, oversized chocolate bar. Sherry explained,

> He went home and thought about it and the next morning he brought a chocolate bar in [and said to the class], 'This is an array! It's four rows by six rows' (Sherry, May 5, 2000).

In choosing to share this recollection, Sherry demonstrated a number of her personal beliefs about teaching and learning. Initially Sherry had spoken to her belief that a professional educator is a person "who learns from teaching [in this case from teaching a protégé] rather than one who has finished learning" (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 8). By being open to new ideas from this preservice teacher, Sherry had confirmed to her class of grade school students as well as to the student teacher himself that together they were partners in learning. She had also personally confirmed that novice teachers were a

valuable source of new knowledge in the classroom and were able to make impactful contributions. By sharing this story with us, she also allowed me to share it in this document to advocate the position that student teachers have a profoundly important place in the growth and advancement in the profession itself.

While not as overt as the previously mentioned "I expect to learn as much from you, as you learn from me" statement, Lynn expanded on the concept of the importance of novice teachers with the following testimonial:

> Having student teachers is an exciting opportunity for the school. For the student to try new ideas and experience the fresh approaches and feel the enthusiasm that the student teachers bring into the building. (Lynn, May 22, 2001)

Many cohort members also spoke of the echo effect pre-service teachers create within host schools. This resonating effect is observed when good teaching strategies or new teaching awareness continue to be explored in either classrooms or host schools once the student teachers complete their field experience and return to either the campus, once the IPT is completed, or graduate at the conclusion of the APT.

> Every time I have a student teacher I think to myself,
> 'I need to work on this more'.
> Even after they're gone!! (Sherry, February 13, 2001)

Speaking long after the conclusion of the final field experience of the 2001 school year, Lynn articulated the reverberation felt once student teachers had returned to campus.

> I still incorporate into my lesson or unit planning many of the strategies or activities the student teachers brought into my classroom. (Lynn, May 15, 2001)

While it is widely accepted that student teachers facilitate the development of mentor teachers, it should not be lost that the professional growth of all members of the working relationship needs to be considered.

Future Leadership Roles

Over the two-and-one-half year duration of this study, I observed numerous role changes. Some members of the cohort exercised their professional development in the form of seeking administrative appointments within their school boards. One intermittent participant shared his feeling for the importance of working with student teachers as it related to his career plans,

> But ever since I've had a continuous contract I've tried, whenever possible, to get student teachers. For me, it's just not an aspect of professional development. I think it's also a professional commitment ..... to the future of teaching. As [a potential] administrator, a large component of the role is supervising teachers and mentoring new teachers. I felt this group would give me the skills and insight needed to do that part of the job better. (S.D. June 11, 2001)

Another member accepted a promotion and moved to district head office from the role of principal to accept a new position overseeing and directing the continuous inservicing of first- and second-year teachers. In addition to these educators, three other cohort members, including Marlene, were asked to become either principals or vice principals within their employment school board. Each reported continuing to advocate for a stronger affiliation with the Faculty of Education [University of Alberta] undergraduate teacher education program within their respective schools. Such advocating includes encouraging in-service teachers either to become cooperating teachers or to seek out graduate school learning opportunities for professional growth.

At the conclusion of the fifth action research cycle, both Ninele and Jackie assumed full responsibility for being school coordinators at their respective schools, a commitment in addition to their roles as cooperating teachers and classroom instructors.

Interest in the Role of Field Experience Associate

As previously mentioned, many cohort members were drawn to the research group not

only because of their strong commitment to the issues surrounding student teaching, but also to become more knowledgeable about the role of the Field Experience Associate. In her self introduction on November 4th, 1999 Sherry shared her vision for the future:

> I plan on working at the University at some point, when I can juggle the time and when my children are a little older. I think curriculum or field experience will be where I want to focus, so that's why I got involved in this program. (Sherry, November 4, 1999)

While Sherry was comfortable sharing her goals and aspirations for the Field Experience Associate role early in the action research process, it was at the end of the third cycle that Sherry discussed privately that she had been coached to consider involving herself in CSI leadership opportunities in order to increase her understanding of field experience issues. In Sherry's own words,

> This is a group that would help me see more of what this role [the field experience associate] is and see what I might be able to do at the school. (Sherry, May 5, 2000)

Marlene also was very candid and open regarding her involvement in the research. Being both a graduate student and a two-time applicant for the job, she felt the added experience of the action research cohort would be beneficial. Beth also added her involvement with the action research groups onto her successful Field Experience Associate application resume.

The Option of Further Graduate Education

The consistent six cohort members also seemed to possess a heightened appreciation for academic pursuits beyond their original Bachelor of Education degree. For example, Sherry and Jackie had each previously completed a Master's degree and, at the time of this writing both are contemplating further graduate studies. Marlene saw the completion of her Master's during this time period, while Beth and Lynn initiated their Master's programs. For this reason, much group discussion was generated regarding either

individual graduate courses that could enhance their understanding of the entire field experience subject or graduate programs specific to mentoring or coaching preservice teachers. Again we revisit Sherry's concluding comments when she speaks of her goals:

> I'm looking for other ways to focus and grow in my career. I did my Masters in [Educational] Administration. That's what I'm looking at, you know, going back to do a Ph.D. at some point. (Sherry, May 5, 2000)

Many members lamented the fact that despite their interest in acquiring more information and greater understanding with regards to mentoring preservice teachers, the courses offered within the current graduate program within the Faculty of Education are rather limited[7]. An examination of the graduate course calender for the 2001/2002 academic school year revealed only one course, entitled 'Seminar in Teacher Education' (EDES 501), which deals primarily with the historical context and current political conditions of pre-service teacher education (p. 91).

Over the last four years as I moved through the process of organizing and promoting both the action research group and the previously described Teacher Education Conferences, I have received numerous inquiries, much like the following email.

[7] It is important to note that a Master of Education program group dedicated to the studies of preservice teaching is currently working its way through the final stages of a three year, part-time studies schedule. It is hoped that that courses offered within this closed program will remain as components of the Department of Secondary Education graduate calender and as such will be open to all interested school coordinators and/or cooperating teachers who choose to acquire greater understanding with regards to preservice teacher education.

Date: Thu, 22 Feb 2001 09:38:16 -0800
From: Donna MSmith<dmsmith@pdq.ab.ca>
X-Accept-Language: en
MIME-Version: 1.0
To: sleppard@ualberta.ca
Subject: Graduate courses
Status:

Stephen, I am interested in finding out more about graduate course work associated with mentoring student teachers. I am planning on attending the workshop on March 2 - The Collaborative Schools Initiative. Will there be any information available there? Perhaps you could send me some information via email.
I look forward to your response.
Donna McSmith

Figure 19: Unsolicited Interest in Graduate Courses

Unfortunately, with each reply I must ask myself the question, 'Why isn't there a graduate course on being a cooperating teacher within the Collaborative School initiative model?"

Such a course could focus on many of the principles outlined in the action research orientation. A graduate level course similar to the one offered by Dr. Renate Schulz and the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba would be well received within the Faculty of Education catchment area. The course offered at the U of Manitoba features a week of summer instruction plus three full Saturdays during the school year. Within the course description, the instructor describes how an explanation of mentoring practices and an exploration of various models of supervision would occur throughout the course. Also promised is an "exploration of the components of collaborative mentoring that constitutes most effectively to the professional growth of both the teacher and the teacher candidate" (R. Schulz, course outline, 2001)[8].

[8] A course outline, in its entirety is provided in the appendix D of this document. Permission was granted via email on February 3rd, 2003.

It is important to note that when the University of Manitoba graduate course was mentioned within the entire action research discussions, many of the consistent six cohort members immediately spoke of their desire to take such a course within the Edmonton area. They also questioned why the Faculty of Education (U of A), considering not only the volume of student teachers which need to be placed each term but also its historic role as an educational leader within Western Canada, had not taken the initiative in this regard. The cohort members asserted that through conversations in their host schools or, for those currently in the role of FEA in multiple schools throughout the greater Edmonton area, they knew of many other cooperating teachers/school coordinators or prospective cooperating teachers/school coordinators who would desire a course like this. The word 'prospective' is featured in the previous sentence, for it would make good sense for the Faculty of Education (U of A) to invest their energy in offering a course for those considering the roles, for the returns could be the eventual eradication of the apprenticeship model in favour of something far more collaborative.

The Gift of Composing Self Understanding

As mentioned in the prelude, memories of a pastoral home filled with pragmatic but playful conversations motivated me as I both initiated and later moved through the process. I appreciate that my dated recollections as well as my most recent undertakings as an action researcher were immensely similar, for each featured dedicated and committed individuals, who, through their deliberate actions, strove to improve both their personal and collective situations. This subsection, therefore, continues the recursive philosophical course started in chapter four and extends itself further, for it relies heavily on both the "action" and "research" components of the action research orientation proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1997), who have suggested that, "[t]he linking of the terms 'action' and 'research' highlights the essential feature of the approach: trying out ideas in practice as a means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge about the curriculum, teaching and learning" (p. 6).

This concluding subsection continues to couple these terms action and research and

affords me the opportunity to ask, 'What will I do differently next time while undertaking action research?'

Quite simply, one of the primary themes of this action research process/preservice teacher education story is of change -- that change can be initiated through creating new knowledge and that knowledge is best created within the collective of concerned and committed individuals. The cohort realized that, when change is required in schools, "the teacher is the ultimate key to educational change and school improvement" (Huberman, 1993, p. vii). For this story of change to be more fully understood, it is necessary to explore the following subsections, creating relationships among participants, authoritative hosting, educational leadership, exercising of power, and facilitating discussion.

Creating Relationships Among Participants

Trying to reconcile my childhood reminiscing with the academic rigour needed to create new knowledge and understanding, I continually asked the question,'How does one create such a mood, or tone once the group has assembled?' Sergiovanni (1994) has cautioned, "There is no recipe for community building, no correlates, no workshop agenda, no training package" (p. 5). With no procedure for community building to act as a guide, the space where genuine conversations (Gadamer, 1997) and authentic community (Palmer, 1997) could emerge was under continual construction, with the blue print for change under constant revision (Tom, 1997). Because of the personal ambiguity I felt at this time regarding my role within the process, I decided to model the initial action research sessions on convenantal relationships (Depree, 1989), which possess "unity, grace and poise" (p. 60), relationships that were observed in both my parents' living room and kitchen as well as the teacher meeting during my final field experience.

To foster this element of generosity, an emotional space was created within the first meeting, a place where participants might create a bond with each other through "kinship, neighborliness and collegiality" (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 7). To effect this I thanked the participants for coming to the meetings with food and had perhaps even created an atmosphere of fellowship that promoted the acquisition of new knowledge (or at least

allowed the participants to feel that they left having had their informational needs met). It is important to note that I pride myself on being one of those participants within the research group. We were beginning to build a collaborative atmosphere, creating an educational community (Palmer, 1999) of learners and eventual coresearchers (Brennan & Noffke, 1997). Through discourse we would sustain, renew and reinvent ourselves over the course of the next two school years. This meaningful collaboration between cohort members and eventual co-researchers is explained by McNiff (1999),

> Your fellow action researchers.... Aim to work collaboratively rather than competitively. You all want to do well. Aim to build an atmosphere of trust and mutual support. It is useful in any research exercise, and essential in action research, which is itself informed by a collaborative ethic. (p. 31)

Gadamer (1997) speaks to this when he suggests that "[t]o conduct a dialogue requires first of all that the partners do not talk at cross purposes... the first condition of the art of conversation is ensuring that the other person is with us" (p. 367). Each member seemingly understood that learning would occur through the act, and the art, of conversation with each other.

Initial Reconnaissance

On November 4th, 1999, once the jocularity of the first few minutes of the initial session of the second action research cycle had subsided, I sensed the need to maneuver the session to the next phase of discourse. Stringer (1996) suggests that "[e]ach meeting should begin with the presentation of a broad agenda that includes statements about ... the purpose of the meeting" (p.72). As the final member concluded their segment of the humourous icebreaker activity[9], group members heard the following commencement words:

> Thank you very much everyone for joining us. Your commitment to

[9] Please see Chapter Four subsection entitled Encouraging a Humorous Tone for a detailed description of the event.

> preservice teacher education speaks volumes for you being here. I think all of us are aware of the reasons I'm here and that is because I'm conducting action research and gathering data with regards to preservice teacher education, specifically focusing on how discourse may improve whole school experiences within Collaborative Schools. (author's notes, November 14, 1999)

Within moments of this homily, the gathered began to surprise, impress and educate me, for I was about to learn as much about myself as I was to learn about mentoring preservice teachers (Sept 10, 1998, journal notes). Carson (1992) confirms that one key premise of action research is that "we may simultaneously inform and change ourselves" (p. 102). Despite not being asked specifically to detail their field experiences, the majority of these highly regarded classroom teachers and cooperating teachers not only recounted less-than-stellar student teaching experiences, they also demonstrated an unsurpassed degree of "unity, grace, poise" (Depree, 1989, p. 60) and candor. The first participant matter-of-factly stated:

> Needless to say [student teaching] wasn't a good experience for me (S.S., November 4, 1999).

A second participant expressed feelings of being unsuccessful during their student teaching experiences, and subsequently, unprepared for the classroom upon graduation with the following attestation:

> I have to admit for my student teaching round I was really bad at it, for quite a bit of the time. The first year was scary. As a teacher and I guess a lot of the things that helped me through, sort of a survival mode[10] were the other teachers, other peers, other cooperating teachers mostly and peers who suffered along with me. (A.M., November 4, 1999)

The third person to speak that day echoed this concern and spoke of her pledge to amend the mistakes she had been a part of:

---

[10] It is interesting to note that the speaker of this quote, because of her previous graduate work examining preservice teacher education, may have referred to Huberman's work intentionally. However, I was only made aware of Huberman's research at the conclusion of this research process.

> My own personal student teaching was not very positive. As a result, whenever I have taken student teachers I've always vowed to try to make it ... 10 times better than what I had (L.PW., November 19, 1999).

The undeniable theme of hurt and frustration while a student teacher was confirmed when a fourth participant cited a stressful example of cooperating teachers whose final words, as they exited the classroom for the duration of the practicum, were:

> Here's the book. This is where we are. Monday morning you pick up from there.
> See Ya! (S.D., November 4, 1999).

Gadamer (1989) addresses the significance of discourse in creating meaning by declaring, "understanding begins ... when something addresses us" (p. 299). Clearly each of the first four participants who spoke felt compelled to divulge a portion of their personal history with regards to the less than successful component of their preservice teacher education, a component which was then referred to as practicum. Kemmis & McTaggart (1997) confirm that the establishment of authentic (Palmer, 1997, Sergiovanni, 1994, Rousseau, 1991) cohorts is determined in large part by founding reflective discourse when they postulate that:

> Most groups ...will need to begin with an initial phase of reflection -- to make an initial reconnaissance of their situation as a basis for deciding on their thematic concern as a basis for planning and action. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997, p. 53)

It seemed that what these successful professionals, one an existing principal, two current vice-principals, and the fourth a soon-to-be appointed vice-principal (all of whom served as school coordinator in their respective highly regarded Collaborative Initiative Schools) created within the first five minutes of that session was a "dwelling place" (Aoki, 1991) where honest dialogue regarding the topic of mentoring student teachers was permitted and valued,. Inspired by this dialogue I asked the reflective questions, 'Were there other cooperating teachers or school coordinators who had experienced these same feelings of

isolation and abandonment during their field experience rounds?'

Sitting transfixed as the conversation swirled about the table, ebbing and flowing between each profoundly committed participant, I again related the moment to memories of a childhood home where food, fellowship, conversation and common goals were celebrated and shared. Sergiovanni (1994) comments on this connectedness when he advises, "Community is the tie that binds ... teachers together in special ways, to something more significant than themselves: shared values and ideals" (p. xiii).

Questioning the Ability to Mentor Effectively

Listening to the collective share their initial stories with the theme of abandonment and lack of support as student teachers, I was moved not only by the honesty within the emergent discourse, but also with the similarity of their experiences to mine. There were other educators out there who had suffered disappointing field experiences! Hearing these four peers describe their practicum background confirmed that my less-than-stellar student teacher experience was almost typical of those who chose to attend. I was personally affirmed, and I hope the others were as well, that there were others who questioned not only their ability to mentor prospective teachers effectively but also their "fraudulent" (McIntosh, 1984) place in the classroom!

I was also shifted, indeed shoved, to a different place in my professional practice, a location where I no longer felt it necessary to veil my story of field experience difficulties and disappointment. While prompted to share my concerns about field experiences for novice teachers, I wondered as to the level of depth I should reveal. Waiting to introduce myself last, and inspired by the level of self disclosure being shared within the budding cohort, I asked the question, 'What story do I wish to tell?'

I was about to reveal a story that I have kept hidden behind fifteen years of successful classroom practice and, while I was nervous, I was not threatened, for I did not feel obligated to disclose. Instead I felt that it was finally time to come to terms with the history I possess, as I have done many times with both undergraduates and site-based

teacher educators. I did reveal my story, which up until this point had only been heard by either family members or a select number of close and trusted friends, though at first I did introduce myself as another practicum casualty:

> My student teaching rounds were a disaster, truly a disaster. I'm not proud of the what happened and I don't know whose fault it was. I'm, ... I'm admitting to some of it being mine, but I'm not sure if situations could have been different.
>
> Much like you, as soon as I had the opportunity, and as soon as I was offered the chance, I made my classroom and my practice available to student teachers and it's only been in the last few years that I've been able to appreciate that it's kind of, ... um, a pay back, a mutual reciprocity, a way of ... righting a wrong or correcting a situation that I felt I didn't have any control of before.
>
> But now that I have control of it and as a school coordinator I can assure that things proceed in a way that I feel are beneficial to the cooperating teacher and the student teacher, so that both are learning and it's ... the reason why I've dedicated going back to school. To examine why ... what we can do to make the lives of student teachers and the people that work with them, the cooperating teachers and school coordinators, fit better. (S.L., November 4, 1999)

Fifteen years of successful teaching practice, including numerous awards and a graduate degree, could not dispel the anxiety provoked by the memory of this event. I needed the others' accounts of less than advantageous student teaching experiences to inspire me to share my story. While I still waited for subsequent sessions to reveal specific details of my practicum, what is important to note at this time was that the honesty and trust needed for me to establish myself within the community had been experienced within the first minutes of the first session of the actual action research. This commitment and trust, however, must continue to be nurtured and allowed to grow within time, for as Kruse (1999) has advised, time will be the catalyst for respect and trust. I left that session, and each subsequent session, vibrating with the power of action research and more firmly committed to its ideals.

Truth Begets Trust

As the introductions and subsequent conversations of the November 4th 1999 session moved forward and gathered momentum, I marveled at the risk taking confidence of these four people who happen to teach. While the initial laughter-packed conversation had been gratifying to both observe and be a part of, the ensuing reflections from each educator, regardless of the teacher education institution, the program route or subject areas specialty they were a part of as undergraduates, spoke of a common experience of isolation, disillusionment and unfriendliness of the host school staff in which their "practicum"[11] had occurred. Gadamer (1997) discusses these types of exchanges in more detail when he states

> in a successful conversation they [the persons engaged in the dialogue] both come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community. To reach an understanding in dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were. (p. 379)

As the others volunteered their field experience stories, it became evident that less than satisfactory experiences as a student teacher were the norm for the group members. This was true for each cohort member gathered that evening with the exception of Ninele, who was consistently positive with regards to her field experience recollections. This led me to ask, 'Was a less than positive practicum experience their motivation for being a school coordinator, for coming to the action research group?'

The heartwarming modesty and searching honesty of each person's dialogue, established early in this session, seemed to set the tone for similar-minded peers seeking assistance and advice from others in the sessions to follow. Palmer (1997) remarks on risk taking in the presence of others when he postulates that

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[11] Please consult Chapter Three for a detailed explanation of the terms "practicum" and "field experience".

> [t]he growth of any craft depends on sharing practices and honest dialogue amongst the people who do it. We grow by private trial and error, to be sure -- but our willingness to try, and fail as individuals is severely limited when we are not supported by the community that encourages such risks. (p. 144)

I marveled at how strangers had fallen into conversation (Gadamer, 1997) with the existing group members by disclosing, honest and at times painful stories with each other. This exchange of student teaching difficulties and/or conundrums while in the role of being a cooperating teacher apparently allowed for a sense of community[12] based on truth, trust and mutual respect to be quickly established and strengthened over the duration of the study. Observing this establishment of a community, I asked, 'What had occurred within the group during the first meeting that allowed the new members to share their stories openly?'

Not only has Sergiovanni (1994) cited other researchers when asserting that "community is a basic human need [and can] be understood as a collective conscience, which is composed of three moral elements: duty, attachment and self-determination" (p. 64), he has also discussed the collective commitment of individuals when he proposes that "people are bonded to each other as a result of their mutual binding to shared values, traditions, ideas and ideals (p. 61). Seeking a forum where the traditions of sharing ideas can be established and valued involves a tremendous amount of risk taking, risk taking in the form of trusting the other person within the conversation. Richardson (1998) has suggested that "action research involves the willingness to fully engage oneself in an uncertain and even uneasy dialogue with others, a dialogue that involves a certain amount of intellectual and emotional risk taking" (p. 23).

The degree of honesty was awe inspiring, for over the course of the study the majority of members disclosed self-perceived failures or shortfalls that until that moment I thought had only resided within me. An example of these public pronouncements of professional shortcomings occurred in January of 2001 during the fourth cycle of the study, when a

[12] According to Osborne (1999) "community, as opposed to a group of people. [In this case]community is based on shared beliefs and values and is much longer lasting" (p. 84).

free ranging discussion developed regarding the difficulties faced when working with an otherwise absolutely "gifted and natural"[13] student teacher with self acknowledged learning difficulties. Being concerned for her reading comprehension abilities, this preservice teacher had confided to her University Facilitator, who at the time was also a cohort member, her absolute fear of oral reading either with or to her students. The cohort group member, while cloaking the identity of this young preservice teacher, had shared the story to understand their role within this delicate matter and to counsel this prospective teacher accordingly. The tone of the session, which up until this discussion had been filled with a positive energy, had shifted to a dialogue that could best be described as part concern for this individual's personal welfare tempered by concern for the professional responsibilities to screen unworthy potential teachers.

At this point in the dialogue a second member of the cohort asked to speak to the topic from her personal experience as a learning disabled adult. During the discussion she not only shared her story of the "struggles and frustrations and how [she] had overcome them" (Rowley, 1999, p. 22) while being both a university student and then a teacher with a learning disability, she also made several suggestions to the others as to how to facilitate learning for both the students in the classroom and the specific student teacher in question. This vignette is highlighted, for while it occurred, the normally carefree and sometimes chatty kitchen-table dialogue ceased and full attention was given to the speakers often accompanied with long periods of silent reflection. I along with the other group members felt that we were living through a watershed event in the life of the cohort. I say watershed, for this event signaled two important considerations. The first was that, while concerns and grievances were discussed regarding the quality of teacher candidates being admitted into the undergraduate program, the tone of this discussion did not return to the negativity once expressed in the earlier discussions. Instead, while regard for the abilities of the recent batch of preservice teachers were acknowledged, these uncertainties were discussed in such a way that positive outcomes to personally and professionally difficult situations could be achieved. Simply stated, instead of complaining about the

[13] These are the precise words, used by the action research participant, to describe the student teacher in question.

problem of teacher candidate qualifications, the rights of learning disabled adult learners were discussed unencumbered by personal opinion and, as a result, became more clearly understood.

The level of trust within the cohort, therefore, deepened substantially. While all cohort members had exhibited trust within the collective, the first person had also exhibited confidence that the group would approach the topic of her concern with sensitive inquiry, careful listening and thoughtful reflection. The second member, the person who responded as the learning disabled adult, demonstrated unconditional faith in the cohort members while sharing the story of her personal learning difficulties and eventual triumphs. While all members had shared their stories with the others, this particular person also shared the gifts of honesty and hope in a "genuine and caring way that engenders trust" (Rowley, 1999, p. 22). Her gift of continued honest, truthful and sincere conversations among peers and the gift of potential conversations with student teachers reverberated through the cohort group members. This person had demonstrated good leadership, for according to Keanie (2001) [who cites the 1997 research from Cash] "[g]ood leaders give certain gifts and ignite a passion while creating a learning organization built on trust, commitment and fun" (p. 4). Norris, McCammon & Miller (2000) describe this type of risk taking among the collective with the comment, "[t]his teacher has shown that she or he is willing to risk showing a tiny bit of fear and at the same time is asking for the help and engagement of the collective group. The teacher is an inch closer to establishing trust" (p. 4).

Authoritative Hosting

Another discovery this research process has afforded me is the revelation that I moved throughout the first few sessions guided by the principles of authoritative hosting. Upon reflection I now appreciate that as conversation turned to asking questions, I began to take the space away, filling it instead (Palmer, 1998) with the preconceived wisdom I was going to impart. So why, therefore, after witnessing and being included in these profoundly emotional "successful conversations" (Gadamer, 1986), did I choose to abandon the mode and instead start to engage in unilateral discussion where I tried to

impose my agenda onto the group?

As the person responsible for inviting the guests, setting food upon the table and hosting the sessions, I felt I was also expected to know the most on the subject and provide all the answers the budding cohort desired in as timely a manner as possible. This productive expedience, while the antithesis of what I had promoted the research to be, stemmed from my need to be pragmatic[14] while serving my peers. I was, after all, "like most professionals, ... taught to occupy space, not open it: after all, we are the ones who know, so we have an obligation to tell others about it" (Palmer, 1999, p. 132). By adhering to this thinking I was perpetuating, "the objectivist myth [in which] truth flows from the top down, from experts who are qualified to know truth ... to amateurs who are qualified only to receive truth" (Palmer, 1999, p. 101). This top-down "controlling style" (Stringer, 1996, p. 108) approach to information dissemination can best be explained by referring to figure 20.

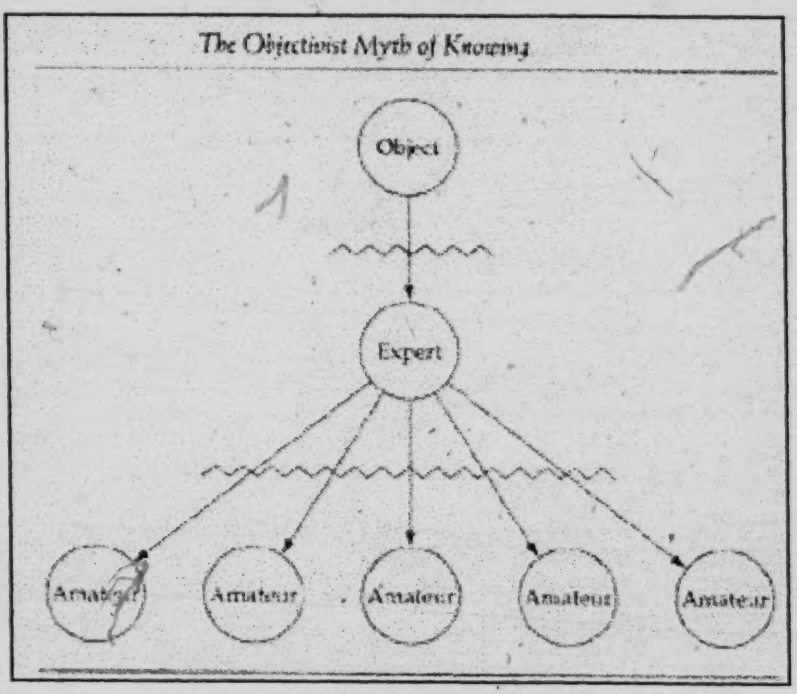

Figure 20: Objectivist Myth of Knowing

Unfortunately, while searching for my role as 'host' within the action research process, I misinterpreted the concepts of democratic leadership and group direction making by placing myself at the top of the group dynamic, therefore imposing my desire for

[14] Please see chapter Two for further details.

unilateral direction and autocratic dominance on the group. Despite my first attempts at what could be called either unilateral leadership in action research or authoritative hosting, ironically, I found that many participants were very supportive of both the session format and my efforts to provide hospitality to them. As one participant would excitedly state at the conclusion of the first season of the official cycle, "This was a good meeting!" (S.D., November 4, 1999). While the generosity of the favorable responses from the group members was appreciated, I grew more uncomfortable with this mode of knowledge building and needed to regulate the timbre of my involvement within the group's discussions. Following each of the preliminary sessions, I asked questions, 'What had made the first meeting a success?' and 'Had I alleviated the concerns or bolstered the confidence of the participants?'

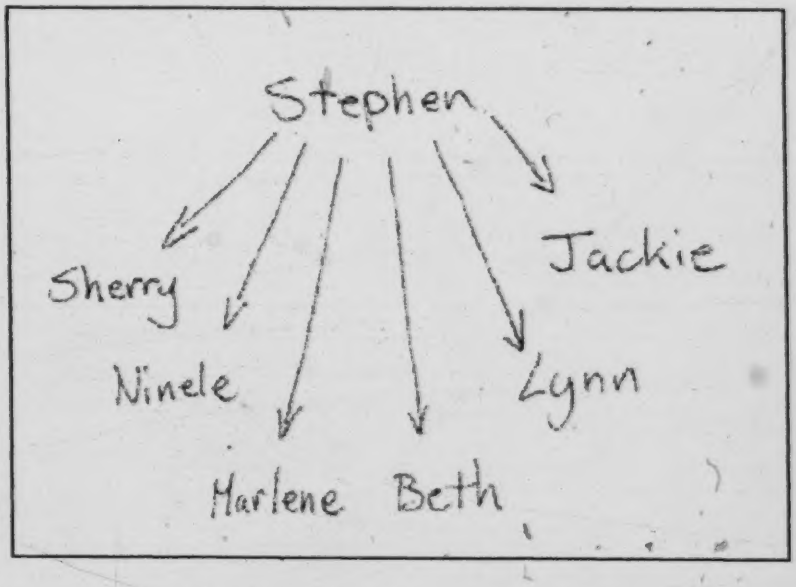

Figure 21: Unilateral Leadership in Action Research

Educational Leadership and the Exercising of Power

The third subsection of this area, which explores creating understanding within myself, is an explanation for the digression from "genuine conversations" (L. Gordon Calvert, 2001) to something far more managed and problematic. This digression is complicated and multifaceted, but has at its core issues related to power and data gathering within action research relationships. The exploration of issues related to perceived power is critical, for as Greenwood & Levin (1998) caution, "[w]ithout an analysis of power relationships,

action research is impossible"[15] (p. 88). It is necessary, therefore, to refer to Zukov (2000) and his theory of external power as it relates to individual and group dynamics

> [e]xternal power is the ability to manipulate and control. External power feels different from authentic power. It [external power] is trying to impress people, do the right thing, or succeed. It is trying to be better, smarter, stronger, or more beautiful. (p. 106)

The reason for such maneuvers on my part may be found with an analysis of the differences between efficiency and effectiveness in educational leadership. It could also be argued that the same traits of power could be demonstrated in leading an action research cohort. Depree (1989) explains the manifestation of power in which, "[e]fficiency is doing the thing right, but effectiveness is doing the right thing" (p. 19). While seemingly interchangeable, these two words, while in conversations with another or within the cohort, needed to be properly calibrated so that the dialogue might be "fallen into" (Gadamer, 1989) without an "undeclared agenda." This endeavour, according to Lambert (1995), depends on the thinly veiled ability to guide "talk that appears to have a public purpose, but instead stems from a private purpose of manipulation" (p. 84). Upon further reflection it became clear to me that the manipulated purpose of these initial conversations was a result of the need for me to exercise power over the data gathering process.

Harvesting Data

Early in the action research process, I appreciated the need to gather details; however, I didn't know what action research data looked like in order to find it. During this time I struggled with the following questions, 'What is the data I'm looking for?' and 'How does one gain data? (or gain control over it?).'

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[15] While the power relationships referred to concern the overarching "power elites" within society (p. 88) which link politics, economy and traditional science, the same quote is just as applicable to the analysis of power at the micro level, that being between individuals needed as they attempt to build relationships during the first few sessions of an action research cohort.

Daunted by the "ambiguity of what constitutes data" (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 60), my overarching concern, an apprehension that I now understand many novice researchers may feel, was that I would not have enough thick or rich data at the conclusion of each session. While still concerned with establishing a tone that would create a dwelling place (Aoki, 1984) in which the participants would feel a part of an authentic community of learners (Sergiovanni, 1994, Palmer, 1999), the need to retrieve convincing data became paramount. While Kemmis & McTaggart (1997) warned, "If you don't collect data as you go, you will be deprived of a solid basis for later reflection and planning" (p. 78), I began to feel frustrated. In hindsight, I now understand that my intent at that time was not to gain knowledge in the presence of these people, but to gain control over this unknown referred to as data collection by bullying my way through the conversations.

As the discussion moved from self-disclosure to a plethora of questions directed at me regarding field experience practices within the Faculty of Education (U of A), I felt myself change as well, from group member to discussion facilitator to director. I insisted that the cohort receive the correct information specific to the current undergraduate program philosophies within USS. While fulfilling this top-down requirement, I reverted to the mentality I possessed much earlier in my research career, the mindset of "conventional researchers ... [whose] response to this unruly world is to do all they can to gain control through reliance on impersonal techniques of

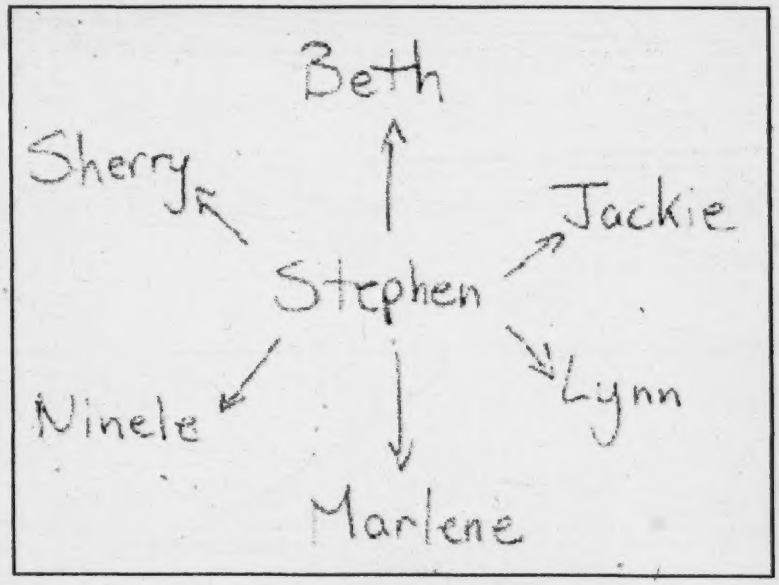

Figure 22: Perpetuating External Power -- Controlling Discourse

data generation and manipulation and through self-discipline" (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 94). Despite appreciating the tenets of action research, which value honesty in both word and deed, I had intentionally placed myself at the center of the circle with the intent of radiating my knowledge outward.

Once I understood the personal stresses involved in perpetuating external power, I also began to realize that I had acted in such a manner because I was unsure of myself as an action researcher in regards to data gathering. While still focused on creating a space where school coordinators could act upon their own concerns (Tripp, 1990) and "bolstering confidence" (Beauchamp, 1989) I became preoccupied with the retrieval of stimulating information. It was then that I realized the richer, thicker, more meaningful data was a result of a thriving conversational process rather than a quest for a product. From that time on I resolved to demonstrate the patience required for this type of dialogue to emerge. In order to exhibit such forbearance I needed to develop both trust in myself and faith in the emerging cadre to help generate and discover data.

Recording and Dynamic Transcribing

During the pilot study I neglected to transcribe the action research sessions -- for transcribing is hard, sometimes tedious and solitary work! This experimental faux pas was rectified during the four subsequent cycles after it was discovered that being a reflective practitioner is not enough: there needs to be rigour both in researching the related literature and in an involvement within the documented events. Involvement within the documented events, for me, included the act of transcribing -- of listening to the particular cadence to a thought, the subtleties of speech or the profound pauses of a conversation repeatedly, until I not only had the passage recorded in type, but also imprinted in my soul. Perhaps these are the distinct attributes McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead (1996) are alluding to when they suggest, "[g]ood action research shares the basic characteristics of all good research, but it also has its own special characteristics" (p. 12). Silverman (2000) also supports this personal approach and advises qualitative researchers that, "you must attempt to transcribe as much as possible of what is said and done, and the setting in which it is said and done" (p. 140).

Analyzing Expressions

Having earlier said that the transcription procedure was tedious, I eventually discovered the routine of listening to and then transforming the dialogue to print tremendously beneficial and, most of the time, enjoyable. By offering more than a starting point to begin with (Silverman, 2000), taping and transcribing liberated me, allowing me to focus instead on relationship building and camaraderie building with the cohort during each session and analysis of data once completed. Stringer (1996) verifies this experience when he explains, "[a]ction research is based on the assumption that the mere recording of events and formation of explanations by the uninvolved researcher is inadequate in and of itself" (p. 7). This attempt to make meaning of data through the use of transcriptions is supported and finds favour with researchers such as Silverman (2000), who cites Atkinson and Heritage [1984]:

> The production and use of transcripts are essentially 'research activities'. They involve close, repeated listening to recordings which often reveal previously unnoted reoccurring features of the organization of talk (p. 150).

While typing out the first few sessions of the second cycle of the action research project, I was aghast at how much I had talked during the session, as if deliberately paving over the dialectic pauses which were necessary for a sincere conversation to emerge. By having both the printed documentation as well as the verbal recordings available, I could continually cycle back through the archives and reflect. These reflections constituted "a conversation with myself" (McCarthy, 1994, p. 49), a conversation that allowed me to break down the analytic process in order to understand the logic that lies behind the analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101).

Disappointed with myself as a researcher, I continually searched back through the tape recording, attempting to use analysis to "make sense of what is going on in real life" (Fletcher, 2001, p. 53). Working through the audio data of the second, third and fourth sessions, I noticed that, despite being concerned with not talking and directing, I had nonetheless controlled and dictated the flow of the conversation. While not exerting as

much overt power, I had nevertheless continued to demonstrate my tendency to become a conversation broker. I had conducted the action research group from an authoritative and controlling power base, which still saw all dialogue channeled through a central speaker (Stringer, 1996, p. 111). By mediating or restarting the dialogue during the momentary lapses in the breathing cycle of a conversation, I forestalled subtle nuances needed within an emerging discussion (figure 23).

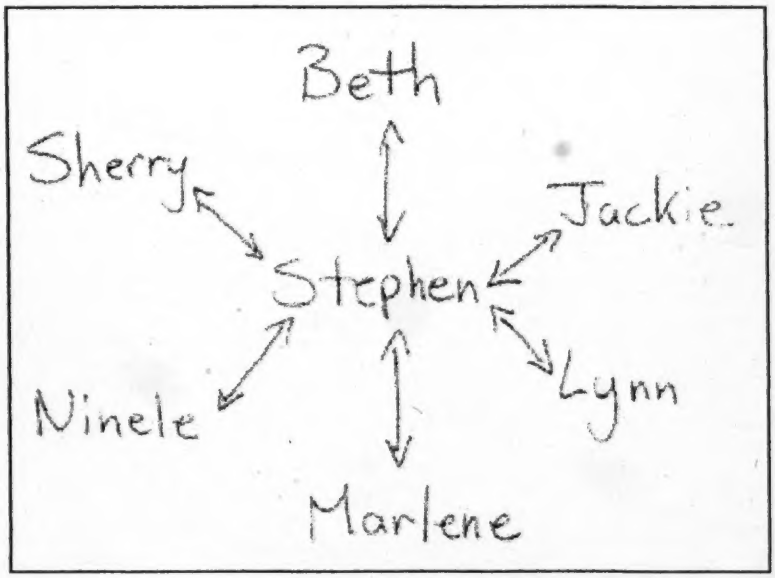

Figure 23: Conversation Broker

Palmer (1998) refers to the latent need of educators to fill in the dialogue spaces as conversational resuscitation when he honestly reflects:

> I live by the ethic of professional responsibility, so in the silence my sense of competence and worth is at stake... and I am duty bound to apply conversational CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation]. (p. 82)

By placing myself in the role of a discourse broker or middleman and pouncing in to jump start the dialogue during pauses, I had undervalued the tacit knowledge of each cohort member and undermined the relationship building that would eventually need to be re-established in order to sustain the group. Referring to these collaborative connections, Stringer (1996) advises:

> As research facilitators assist other participants in developing supportive links, they should be wary of inserting themselves as permanent

> intermediaries in the linking process. Where they continue to act as 'middlemen' research facilitators inhibit the development of positive working relationships between participants and others with whom they work. They maintain control and increase their power in a situation at the expense of those they are assisting. (p. 109 - 110)

Through the act of precisely listening to, and then physically typing out the discourse which would eventually be over 300 typed pages of data for cycles two through five, I came face-to-face with the reality of my subtly overpowering nature. As a result of this internal confrontation, I appreciated the importance of being a more effective action researcher. I also learned to acknowledge that a "good host is not merely polite to the guest -- the good host assumes that the guest has stories to tell" (Palmer, 1998, p. 7). Allowing pauses would establish an authentic community within our cohort. Sergiovanni (1994) speaks to the problematic nature of establishing authentic communities for school based personnel when he states,

> Indeed it is probably the case that authentic community can never be achieved in schools in pure form. But this reality should not deter us from struggling to build community from where we are now. What is important is that our quest for community be a sincere one. (p. 32)

Through this realization I not only learned to listen to the common threads that may generate future discussion themes, I also learned to listen carefully to myself. Wolvin and Oakley (1988) support this notion and suggest that "learning comes from listening, not from talking" (as cited in From Person to Person, 1995). Embarrassed by what I had heard, I vowed to tone down my dictatorial dialogue and instead nurture the input of the others during the next few sessions.

Facilitating Discussion

The opportunity to relinquish the authoritative grip occurred following the second meeting of the third rotation, which took place on February 2nd, 2000 -- a session I was not able to attend. In this session thick, rich questions which could not fail "to arouse a lively curiosity" (Huberman, 1993, p. 3) emerged. As discussion ensued, I began to

appreciate that the group could not only survive without my presence, it could thrive as well. Instead of following the original inclination to cancel the session, I asked Marlene to facilitate the discussion. As was customary, in the days following the session I began the transcription process. During this data sift, I was immediately affected by the ease with which Marlene inspired dialogue among herself and the three other cohort members in attendance. While working through the 60 minutes of tape recording and the 17 pages of transcribed text, I realized that an increased exchange of ideas, information and data could be achieved when, as a facilitator, I invest energy into understanding the fundamental principles of social equity. Greenwood & Levin (1998) discuss permitting group influence when they recommend that "Action Research is about the transformation of power relationships in the direction of greater democracy" (p. 88).

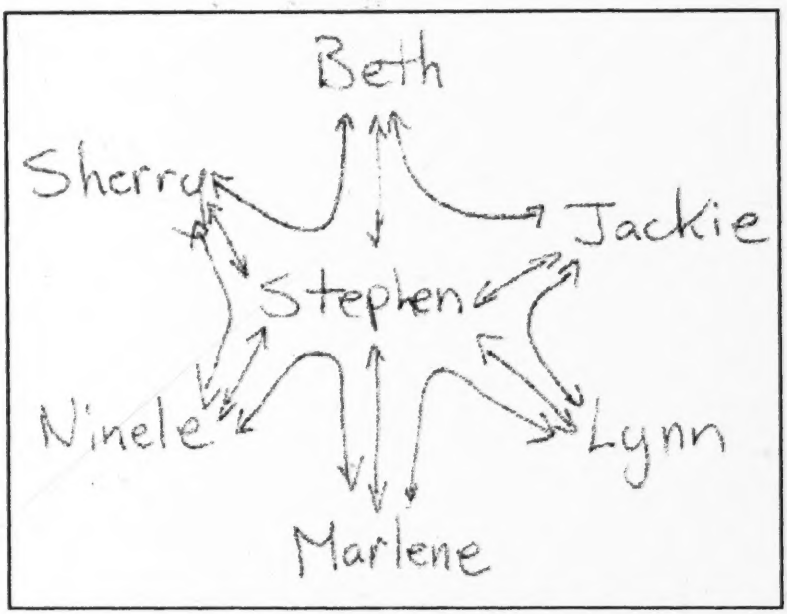

Figure 24: Facilitating Discussion among Participants

I also marveled at how evenly spread the discourse was among the collaborators, for Marlene had allowed a space to be created where each participant was permitted to describe adequately their diverse situation and then seek suggestions for specific host school concerns. Depree (1989) refers to this need for conversational space:

> [l]eaders owe people space, space in the sense of freedom. Freedom in the sense of enabling our gifts to be exercised. We need to give each other the space to grow, to be ourselves, to exercise our diversity. We need to give

> each other space so that we may both give and receive such beautiful things as ideas, openness, dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion. And in giving each other the gift of space, we need also to offer the gifts of grace and beauty to which each of us is entitled. (p. 17)

Hearing Marlene's pauses along with her deliberate acknowledgement of others in her dialogue, I reflected that I had entered the process uncomfortable with the act of dialogic reciprocity. Repeatedly returning to the "naturally occurring interactions" (Silverman, 2000, p. 126) of her session, I now admit that where she had acknowledged the voices of others, I had not. Tom (1997) proposes that "[l]eaders often must put aside their personal ideas and work to bring out the ideas of colleagues (p. 192). By allowing the participants to talk, ask questions and muse aloud, Marlene demonstrated a new way of generating the coveted data I so desperately sought. When it did emerge, the data would prove to be more poignant and powerful because the information shared and discussed at these gatherings would serve to heighten the participant's understanding of the processes involved in planning host school events during future field experiences. The cohort was learning not only what to do within their schools, they were also discussing why it was important to do it that way.

Jettisoning the 'Mediator' Mentality

The establishment of relationships within the group, and the consequential development of a sincerely powerful data base would only occur once I jettisoned the discussion mediator mentality and started to acknowledge the wisdom within the collective and the power of the group, not only to solve problems but to suggest changes that would impact their personal practice and field experience in their schools. By listening to Marlene's facilitation of discussion, and by trying to replicate it, I began to listen to the wants and needs of the cohort. In doing so, I began to think differently about data and I began to appreciate profound changes in the collaborative process if the participants were encouraged to forge their own links. Gordon Calvert (2001) echoes the power of this communal discourse when she affirms that within her research, "Conversations ... within my community of colleagues frequently allowed me to think differently about data, descriptions and interpretations made" (p. 6). By learning to listen to their conversations,

I also learned to honour that the cohort wanted to know more with regards to field experience than simply examining the whole school experiences. They wished to become knowledgeable in order to effect change.

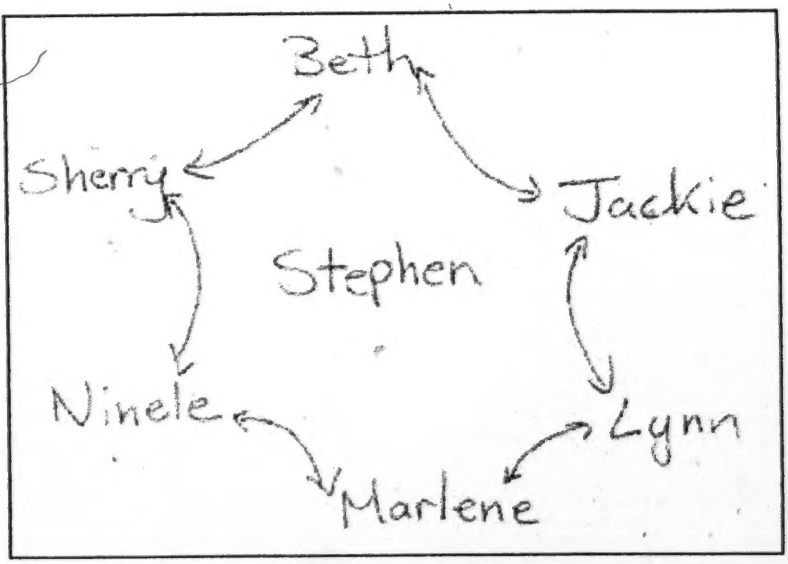

Figure 25: Cohort Conversations

In discussing the aims and goals of action research, Kemmis & McTaggart (1997) also support the need of participants to chart their own professional development and to discuss the need to create knowledge within the group membership:

> '[c]hanging people' is extremely difficult to achieve -- especially when the 'people' are treated as 'other' -- the objects of someone's plan for change -- rather than as knowing subjects, willing and able to determine their own roles in the improvement process. Collaborative action research in education aims to establish groups of knowing subjects committed to changing themselves and, by doing so, changing their educational work. (p. 44)

In order to properly facilitate knowledge creation within knowing subjects[16], no, research cohorts, I needed to rethink my role as leader. Paulo Freire (1973), the renowned adult educator, advises that, "[k]nowledge is not extended from those who consider that they know to those who consider that they do not know. Knowledge is built up in the relationship between human beings" (p. 109).

[16] The term 'subjects' comes from another research paradigm. Throughout this research process I strove to be as inclusive and egalitarian as possible.

Embracing Authentic Power

Instead of conducting (Gadamer, 1989, p. 383) research by orchestrating dialogue based on authority or dominance, I needed to embrace ideas of authentic power. To help explain this migration I refer once again to Zukov's (2000) theory of authentic power:

> Authentic power feels good. It is doing what you are supported to be doing. It is fulfilling. Your life is filled with meaning and purpose. You have no doubts. You have no fears. You are happy to be alive. You have reason to be alive. Everything you do is joyful. Everything is exciting. You look forward to each day. (p. 105)

This process of stepping out of the leadership role and becoming a true member of the group is symbolized in figures 22 and 23, which sees me taking a place around the kitchen table and taking in and benefiting from the discourse as it swirls around me. By embracing the unknown (McNiff, 1996, p. 33), giving up dialogic control of the meetings and never letting the ideas become more important than the people involved in the process, I became more comfortable with the uncertainty of the action research process, which at times still runs counter to the doctrine of the well organized, and well planned teacher. Greenwood and Levin (1997) have validated this incertitude and suggest that

> a core belief in action research is that there are always more possible futures than appear at first to be open, and there is a significant effort in all action research to reanalyze the past, project what happened against other possible outcomes. (Greenwood & Levin, 1997, p. 97)

Investing in Silent Intervals and Careful Listening

Once I had become cognizant of the conversational trait of paving over pauses, it also became obvious that the traditional inservice format would not suffice. In its place a welcoming shelter would need to be created and sustained over time to allow the cohort to establish its own distinguishable code and culture while discussing more than just the assigned topics. In order for this discussion culture to emerge, an appropriate amount of comfortable dialogic silence would need to be experienced within each session.

Zimmerman (1995) supports this migration towards the acquisition of new knowledge through the acts of both listening and thinking when he postulates that, "the ability to think about our own thinking, is increased with focused quiet time. Groups need to explore comfortable ways of working with silence" (p. 113).

Palmer (1998) advises that the facilitators of learning should be more concerned with enabling the people with whom they interact:

> When I reminded myself that to teach [or in this case, be a researcher/participant in a research cohort] is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced -- that I need to spend less time filling the space with data and my own thoughts and more time opening a space where students [or in this case - fellow educators] can have a conversation with the subject and with each other. (p. 120)

By removing myself from the pragmatic information dispensing and data finding mode and instead shifting to a silent, yet still present participant, I allowed myself to be moved along with the group, at times being carried in their wake. The pauses in cohort discourse allow the speaker a space to breathe and participants time to gather their thoughts about the last discussion topic. During our remaining sessions "the silence felt easy, like a fullness rather than a void" (Sanders, 2001, p. 48). Zimmerman (1995) supports this migration towards acknowledging the pauses in our speech and continues this thought by stating:

> It is the pauses in our speech that give it its cadence and the shape. The pauses give us fractions of seconds to think about what we are saying. Here we are suggesting that groups consciously pay attention to the cadence of a group and impose some quiet time for reflection when needed. (p. 113)

Once no one tried to fill those silent pauses, I not only became a competent leader but also a more sound researcher as well because of careful listening. According to Miller et al (1979) "[c]areful listening, your total presence, is a precious gift you can give. It's a gift that communicates care and concern" (p. 66). I now understand that while in the midst of

the social event, goals and dreams are also being shared with the hopes of having them realized. In a sense the participants are bestowing gifts upon each other. Therefore, my gift to the group was to stop talking and let the conversations flow. Testimony to this fact is provided by Sherry, as she reflects on the process of dialogue within the cadre

> it was very much an opportunity to discuss, learn from other people. I learned a great deal, I really did. I sort of had a clearer idea of where I was trying to go. I mean maybe ... just a clearer vision of where you were trying to get, although maybe you didn't want to do that. *Maybe you wanted us to talk*. (Sherry, May 5, 2000, speaker's emphasis).

This observation confirmed the conscious effort to pull back from the discussions once the catharsis of the fifth session of the third cycle had been evaluated and reflected on. Another participant acknowledged the difficulty of balancing both roles,

> I know that you were careful not to talk too much, but I enjoyed hearing what you had to share as well because there were so many ideas there. Like what you did when you were a coordinator at your school. (L.PW. May 8, 2000)

Their gift to me was dialogue, thick and rich with concerns for issues related to student teachers' field experiences. Their gift to the profession itself will be the awareness they created and their passion for improving the preservice teacher education practices within their host schools or school districts and the University of Alberta field experience placement area.

Chapter Synopsis

This chapter has explained the growth among the cohort members. The next chapter will examine the personal and professional growth I have experienced during this research.

CHAPTER 6:

THE ACTUAL AND THE POSSIBLE

In chapter one I described Kemmis & McTaggart's four-stage model of action research: Planning, Acting, Observing and Reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997). Upon reflection at the conclusion of each cycle of this project I see that I employed the same cycles while researching this topic. In addition to several cycles of action research being shown, the entire project parallels chapters specific to the outlined action research cycles. For example the first chapter, describing the theoretical underpinnings of Action Research, constitutes the planning stage. The second and third chapters, which explore the historical context of both teacher education in general and, more specifically, the historical chronology of the action research process among the cohort, therefore, constitutes both the acting and observing stages. The preceding chapter would therefore classify as the reflective component of the action research cycle.

This concluding chapter, therefore, represents the *fifth stage* of a previously discussed four cycle pattern, a "Replanning" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997, p. 12) stage that allows the six members of the cohort and me the opportunity to voice our discoveries, ideas and suggestions for large scale improvement within the field experience segment of the undergraduate teacher education program at the University of Alberta. It is a compilation of recommendations, both large or small, that we spawned throughout the process. This recurrent cycle, which features proposals, is critical for success in action research, for as Kemmis & McTaggart (1997) advised:

> We need to see proposals and efforts for 'improvement' as parts of a bigger picture -- a broad, deep, critical and self-critical perspective on the relationship between the *actual* and the *possible* in our work, between what we are doing and what might be done. (p. 30)

By raising questions and presenting "blueprints for change" (Tom, 1997) which explore more fully 'what might be done' (Kinchleloe & Steinberg, 1996), the first subsection, entitled "Attitude and What Constitutes Practice," will delve into the preparatory

practices of the committed six action research cohort members. The word 'preparatory' is the primary theme within this first section, for the cohort felt strongly that a tremendous amount of relationship building needed to be in place before prospective teachers/student teachers arrive within host schools. Within this section numerous possibilities for pre-field experience contact with both student teachers and prospective cooperating teachers will be featured.

In the second half of this chapter, entitled "Ideas-in-Action during Field Experience," a shift in the cadence to a more pragmatic tone, based in large part on research testimonials from within the cohort, is made. While these ideas are admittedly down-to-earth in nature -- from the seemingly pedestrian suggestion of greeting student teachers at the door with a handshake and a name tag to the presumably more onerous responsibility of working *with* a student teacher to write a final evaluation -- each has buried within the question, 'How can I improve ...?' (Whitehead, 1989).

Attitudes and What Constitutes Practice

Initially I intended to launch research that would give school coordinators the opportunity to co-plan whole school experiences for student teachers. I was to do this as expeditiously as possible by gathering school coordinators together to create a shopping list of proven best practices. These ideas would then be distributed to less informed individuals in host schools. While elements of this intention did occur, it became increasingly important to allow the voice of each cohort member to script events. What I was not aware of was the importance that asking questions, and then seeking solutions, would have in the knowledge building process. These questions, therefore, serve to prompt this section. Perhaps the most significant question was posed by Silverman (2000, p. 8), "How do attitudes relate to what we actually do -- our practice?" (p. 8).

By raising questions which explore more fully "our beliefs," the following five subsections -- collaboration with another, pre-field experience discussions with staff, changing expectations of field experience, pre-field experience gatherings with student teachers and intentional cohort building through weekly conversations -- will attest to the

importance the cohort gave to establishing cordial, pre-field experience contact and discussion with both the student teachers and host school staff. Palmer (1998) weaves both the necessity for educational reform, in this case preservice teacher education reform, with the need to acknowledge the individuality of the educator when he states that:

> In our rush to reform education, we have forgotten the simple truth: reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising text if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource called the teacher on whom so much depends. Teachers must be better compensated, freed from bureaucratic harassment, given a role in academic governance, and provided with the best possible methods and materials. But none of that will transform education if we fail to cherish -- and challenge -- the human heart that is the source of good teaching. (p. 3)

Collaboration with Another

As two school coordinator partnerships within the cohort would testify repeatedly, collaboration with another -- working together and building a partnership within this role -- not only helped "magnify their strengths and help each other overcome their weaknesses" (Beauchamp and Parsons, 1995, p. 25), but proved personally gratifying as well. Both Beth and Lynn (along with the other unnamed pair of school coordinators) had been affected by and subsequently profited from the power of partnership in the role of school coordinator. While it could be argued that a school coordinator partnership may make little or no difference to the whole school field experience that student teachers are a part of, what is important to remember is that teaming was interpreted by those who had tried it as being personally rewarding, for it promoted both professional growth and rigourous reflection. Perhaps this is all the testimony needed to recommend the collaborative approach for this role. Hainsworth (1993) describes how successful collaboration will only occur "where people are rewarded for what they achieve together rather than for what they achieve on their own" (p. 6). This call for collaboration was echoed in an interview with Lynn when she explained her reasoning for having a partner in the role of school coordinator

> ... the benefit of having two school coordinators was that it modeled professional collaboration between colleagues for student teachers, and our cooperating teachers. (Lynn, May 23, 2001)

Upon reflection I feel it would be prudent and professionally responsible to encourage co-school coordinating in the future, prudent in that it would be wise to have a second pair of eyes and ears to help assess the established host school program and professionally responsible to have continuity when one of the partnered school coordinators is either sick for a day or relocates to another school.

Pre-field Experience Discussions with Staff

The action research cohort also spoke at considerable length about how, once a purposeful collaboration (Gable and Manning, 1997) is established with another educator within the role of school coordinator, discussion must then occur with all staff members as to the intent of the field experience program within the host school site. This pre-field experience group dialogue was deemed critical for the eventual success of any field experience programs attempted within host schools using the Collaborative School Initiative. As Marlene suggested in her Master's thesis, "[i]n collaboration, relationships develop around shared and valued ideals of all members" (Keanie, 2001, p. 3). This concern for the value of the experience for all classroom teachers within the school and not just the cooperating teacher is validated by Fullan et al (1998) when they state,

> The goal is not to create a high quality program as an end in itself, but rather to influence the sustained quality of teaching and learning in schools over time, across systems. Teacher education should be a subsidiary question to the larger one of improvement of systems. (p. 34)

This assertion along with the emphasis on school wide improvement is crucial, for while planning past whole school experiences, I was more focused on creating a positive, welcoming place that fostered the personal growth and professional development within student teachers to the exclusion of informing or even listening to staff member concerns. I now appreciate that this only addresses half the key stakeholders within the building

and therefore half of the issues involved in successful field experiences. In the words of a now graduated student teacher, "the student teacher isn't receiving a whole school experience; instead, the whole school is having an experience related to [the process of mentoring] student teachers" (M.O. personal communication, July 20, 2002). I now recognize that if events which attempt to bridge the gulf between staff members and student teachers, and which welcome preservice teachers into the school culture, are undertaken, then initial and honest communication with all staff members is essential. The ideal of mutual dialogue and shared understanding among educators within schools begs the following questions, 'How do we facilitate the coming together of all staff members?' (Marlene, October 7, 2000), 'Where do these discussions take place?' (Lynn, November 2, 2000) and 'When can such dialogue occur? (Ninele, January 19, 2000). These questions, along with others posed by the cohort, will be explored in the following subcategories: communication out to host school, information within schools and input from staff.

Communication Out to Host Schools

The first subcategory is the concern about information dissemination to host schools from the Faculty of Education. One vehicle for the better distribution of information could, or should, be the University Facilitator. However, this person's role received surprisingly little attention during discussion. This was surprising considering that the U.F.'s role of facilitating dialogue between the Faculty of Education and the host schools is repeatedly mentioned at U.F. orientation sessions at the start of each academic school year. Instead dialogue around the table focused primarily on the role of the school coordinator and how this person was, for all intents and purposes, the conduit of information from the Faculty of Education. Marlene spoke to the logistical problems of broadcasting information to the nearly 600 host schools situated within the Faculty of Education (U of A) field experience area:

> I think part of the problem might be, because I'm working with the Collaborative School Initiative, is that when the school wants information, I give them information over the phone and then I typically send them a

> letter and this little pamphlet. But that pamphlet just talks about field experience [at the University of Alberta] and then there is that one section that talks about the Collaborative School Initiative, but it doesn't really outline what we [the Faculty of Education or the Undergraduate Student Services] really do. (Marlene, November 30, 2000)

Marlene then concluded her description with the question, 'So could we not do something better!?' (November 30, 2000).

One communication option that received a great deal of discussion was the recently constructed Undergraduate Student Services internet web site. The concern raised was that not many school coordinators knew the site was available or had either the knowledge or technology with which to access it. After being introduced to the web page for the first time, Sherry was impressed by the site and became quite animated when sharing her findings with the cohort:

> [It is] very interesting, some of the things that we're proposing on the Internet. Like course outlines of what the student teachers have taken. That would be extremely helpful for me, as a cooperating teacher, to know what they know. To see their lesson plan format and what they are learning. (Sherry, May 5, 2000)

Information within Schools

Once communication reached the host schools, the concerns of relaying pertinent information to host school staff members was discussed. It was generally agreed that the establishment of communication links was essential if the sharing of values and ideals for field experiences were to take place. Many members proposed it would be prudent to initiate field experience specific discourse among staff members early in the school year -- as early as September! However, many cohort members also shared examples of how teachers and principals actively discourage in-school visitors at the beginning of the year. Others questioned whether it would be difficult to gain cooperating teachers' interest in field experience issues or concerns when the event was two months away! While timely and concise communication was deemed critical for success, others, including Ninele,

asked the following questions during the WestCAST session in Calgary, "What information do school based preservice teacher educators need?" and "When is a good time to send information regarding field experience out to host schools?" (February 22, 2001).

Jackie responded,

> [w]ith the staff, making sure that there is a common understanding of the expectations and the requirements. Every staff meeting I'd talk about student teachers or what is happening on campus. During these discussions it is important to acknowledge and praise the good work that is occurring in the school. (Jackie, February 22, 2001)

As the expected field experience dates draw near, these staffroom conversations may deserve increasingly more time and could include a more detailed review of the field experience dates and a description of each stage of the undergraduate degree. Wide ranging interchanges regarding possible whole school experiences, and the expectations for staff members who wish to consider themselves candidates for being a cooperating "mentor" teacher (Keanie, 2001), could also be nourished at this time. This is where questions such as Lynn's began to be addressed, "How do we make sure that cooperating teachers see the progression in the undergraduate program?" (Lynn, May 22, 2001).

Once this idea had been passed back and forth across the table, there arose a need to calibrate the number of details staff members may initially require. As Sherry has suggested,

> Sometimes, with my staff, I didn't even use the terms IPT and APT because people didn't know what that means. I simply state ... ,
>
> 'Here are the four week students and this is the kind of experiences they have had on campus. They have had no curriculum courses, so don't expect that they are there to take over your class' (Sherry, April 11, 2001).

Input from Staff

While the suggestion to discuss issues related to student teaching within a staff meeting environment received endorsement from all of the cohort, a tertiary discovery was the importance of encouraging input from all teaching staff, including those educators not directly acting as cooperating mentor teachers as well as custodial and support staff. Every staff member needs to feel confident that their questions, comments or concerns are valued and have a place in shaping the whole school experiences pre-service teachers will engage in.

Many cohort members made the argument that office staff members, because of their proximity to the front door, may have a better perspective on the anxiety that student teachers are feeling as they walk through the school's front door for the first time or the embarrassment they feel as they wander the hall, looking for a specific classroom. By allowing activity, encouraging probing comments and then expecting tough, open-ended or unbounded questions to be asked regarding field experience expectations, a situation may be created where collegial trust is heightened. This type of discourse may also provide opportunities to open ourselves and broaden our horizons to alternate possibilities (Gordon Calvert, 2001, p. 4).

Changing Expectations of Field Experience [according to the CSI protocol]

This subsection explores the theme of changing expectations within the Faculty of Education's field experience program. Since many staff members may have either not graduated locally or convocated from the Faculty of Education (U of A) years ago, a number of cohort members spoke of their need to inform their fellow teachers of the subtle changes to the undergraduate program in accordance with the CSI, including the revised role of the University Facilitator and the newly developed role of the School Coordinator. Frustration was regularly expressed as to the seemingly entrenched mindset among many existing cooperating teachers who locked their filing cabinet so that student teachers would "need to do everything from scratch" while teaching a full assignment. In this way the professional elitism that perpetuates the "rite of passage" of student

this way the professional elitism that perpetuates the "rite of passage" of student teachers (Brooks and Sikes, 1997; Greenwood & Levin, 1998) has not changed from the days of the one room school house or the Normal School training of the early Canadian prairies[1]. It would seem that our profession still has some teachers who think that student teachers need to survive their on-the-job training practica in order to be successful teachers. Portner (1998) expresses his concern for providing teacher candidates with the appropriate amount of information and materials when he cites a 1990 Massachusetts Teachers' Association report that equates teaching preparation to other professions:

> To withhold the basic tools needed for success until the new teacher has the time and familiarity with the system to seek them out is to deliberately handicap that person. Imagine not telling the resident surgeon where the operating room is located, or not providing surgical instruments as he/she stands over that first appendectomy. (p. 31)

As the next four subcategories -- looking past "the practicum," entire school commitment, recruiting new cooperating teachers and screening existing mentor teachers -- will attest, the theme of modeling collegiality while attempting to instill change resonated throughout the cohort's discourse.

Looking Past 'the Practicum'

In modeling collegiality the cohort needed to look no further than a former Field Experience Associate who was instrumental in establishing the CSI. Yurick obtained a doctoral degree studying the effects of CSI inside host schools within the Faculty of Education (U of A) catchment area, including the school of which he is now head administrator. During his discussion with the action research cohort, Mark challenged the cohort to question the motives of existing preservice teacher education models with the following passage:

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[1] Please see Chapter Three, section entitled 'The Historical Understanding of Preservice Teacher Education' for greater detail.

> As I shared with one of my student teachers this morning, certainly my goal with working with her is not to get her through our program. She is bright, she is articulate, she will get through the program. The goal is in five years from now *will she be a colleague?*
>
> So I think that kind of underscored what I was trying to do. To look at what is it that is happening here. What is, ... what is being written about preservice teacher education and how do we mediate these experiences within the time we have these individuals for, and to prepare them to the extent that we can for what they are about to face within their first year or two or three of teaching. (M. Yurick, November 30, 2000, speaker's emphasis)

At the conclusion of the discussion that evening, Mark left us with an additional question to ponder:

> Are we preparing the preservice teacher for student teaching or are we helping them prepare themselves for a career in teaching?
>
> If the way we teach has changed, then why hasn't the way we educate preservice teachers? (M. Yurick, November 30, 2000).

With this challenge to nurture future colleagues, Mark set in motion a discourse that would resonate throughout the action research process, for at its hub was the survival of the fittest mentality. This future colleague versus right of passage is highlighted poignantly as Beth spoke passionately about forthright conversations she has had with cooperating teachers regarding the degree of support, guidance and nurturing student teachers may require. Her retelling of this particular conversation with a cooperating teacher who still felt compelled to let student teachers work in isolation is illustrated here, for it emphasizes the struggle of instilling attitudinal change:

> So I heard the cooperating teacher say ... I had to do it on my own, I expect them to do it on their own!!'
>
> That's the hardest thing to try to change in people. So as the [University] Facilitator I've asked the question ... , 'If you were a new person on staff and you needed help with something, would you be afraid to ask?'
>
> Their response is usually. 'No' (Beth, May 31, 2001).

Beth continued her retelling of the situation and stressed that when the situation was contrasted to assisting an existing and certified teacher peer, fellow teachers are usually much quicker to offer assistance:

> [Then I ask the question]...
> 'If you knew of someone new that was coming on staff, would you be willing to share ... [your resources]?"
>
> Again the response is usually ... ,
> 'Of course!'
>
> Then why wouldn't you do it with student teachers? We need to model collegiality. (Beth, May 31, 2001)

As Beth's story illustrates, student teachers are often not afforded the same courtesies as other professionals. This concept was visited repeatedly within the cohort discourse. Still resonating from both the "five years from now will she be a colleague?" question asked by Mark Yurick and Beth's retelling of her encounter with a cooperating teacher, a few months later a cohort member reflected on how the subsequent discussions caused her to investigate previously held beliefs regarding her relationships with cooperating teachers and student teachers.

> I feel that the action research group has really ... changed a lot of my own thinking. It was a shift in the way I view cooperating teachers. I was very thankful for it because I think it focused on developing those relationships, collaboration. All those things that I believe in. (L.PW. May 8, 2000)

Committing the Entire Host School

The second concern related to issues involving changing expectations of field experience is the need to have the entire school committed to the improvement process. In a report shared at the 1998 WestCAST conference[2], a number of Faculty of Education (U of A) personnel responsible for initiating the CSI stated that "the initiative allows all teaching staff, not just cooperating teachers, opportunities to share their expertise and skill with

[2] Please see Chapter Four, subsection entitled 'Going Public at WestCAST' for a more detailed explanation.

student teachers" (Barry et al, 1998, p. 52). Brooks & Sikes (1997) also support this suggestion. However, they also propose that all teachers within host sites be afforded the opportunity to become acquainted with the expectations of the current field experience program.

> All teachers, not just those who are involved as designated mentors: all need sufficient knowledge of the scheme to be able to support colleagues and students. They need to be informed about procedures and about such things as lesson observation and feedback techniques, in case students ask to observe them or they are required to observe students. (p. 65)

This sentiment for inclusion of staff members was supported by another action research session's guest during the second session of the fourth rotation, October 5th, 2001. As a coordinator involved in planning secondary education programming within the Faculty of Education, Joe Norris stressed:

> It's not just the cooperating teachers we can learn from. We can learn from all members of the school community. It's the classroom students we can learn from. It's the principal and it's also the support staff. (J. Norris, October 5, 2001)

The importance of a supportive and understanding host school's administration also received attention. Whether it was, according to an intermittent participant, "convincing administrators that it is valuable to have student teachers and to have 'prep' time to meet with them" (C.M., October 5, 2000) or working with an already on-side leadership team, many group members emphasized the significance of having administrative support while carrying out the role of school coordinator. Another periodic participant, herself part of a school administration team as well as a school coordinator, testified to the substantial role the head administrator plays in instilling the school wide value of adding student teachers into the overall mix of the school culture, "[t]he principal certainly advocates having student teachers in the school. He appreciates the benefits for our teachers in their own professional development" (S.S. April 28, 2000).

Mindful of the top-down mentality that often puts off many classroom teachers, the

cohort also discussed the unsettling question originally voiced by Beth, 'What if teachers do not wish to become knowledgeable as to the latest expectations, or do not wish to be seen as potential mentors?'

While the ensuing discourse was far from conclusive, there was agreement that an effective way to address this concern would be to highlight the potential for school and individual teacher renewal through the act of mentoring a teacher candidate. According to Lynn, her host school was transformed into a place with a "professional development focus" (Lynn, May 22, 2001) once the staff agreed to host an entire class of EDFX 200 student teachers. Fletcher (2000) validates and discusses this potential effect on schools:

> Mentoring changes the dynamics of the classroom and also the staffroom because it has a direct effect on pupils' learning in the classroom and on the ethos of the school. Effective mentoring is a whole-school issue. Consideration of the impact on the school must be the first priority -- but the teachers and pupils are the school -- so the degree to which mentoring has impact is directly related to all of the personnel involved. (p. 16)

Perhaps the most profound testimonial in this regard was given by an intermittent cohort member who, after hearing the cohort discourse, revealed a migration in his thinking and therefore his practice with student teachers within the entire school. This comment is shared, for this particular discussion group member had, perhaps, been the most hesitant to accept the importance of sharing student teachers among the entire school or giving them time to converse, plan or reflect among themselves:

> Teaching doesn't occur in isolation, or shouldn't. Student teaching shouldn't either. Just because you're assigned to one cooperating teacher doesn't mean you stick to that person's teaching style and classroom. You should see more of the school. You should swap classes with another student teacher. You should try ... even if science is your specialty, try teaching an art class. (S.D. June 11, 2001)

One participant within the cohort stated, "If a teacher is not willing to engage in the new way of thinking about mentoring, perhaps they should not be working with student teachers in the first place" (S.S. January 19, 2000).

The third expectation of change centers on a discussion which continued to loop back to the concerns raised about recruiting exemplary teachers to volunteer their classroom and their expertise as cooperating mentor teachers. This recruitment theme is featured in one participant member's comments:

> The action research group has been a very positive connection. So I have been thinking a lot more about [the benefits of being a cooperating teacher]. So I think in my own dialogue with other professionals it *is* having an impact. I'm speaking very positively about it [the process of mentoring a student teacher] and encouraging others to consider taking student teachers. (L.PW. May 8, 2000)

While speaking positively of the mentoring process and encouraging fellow teachers to become mentors is an affirmative outcome of this research, Brooks & Sikes (1997) provide a cautionary note with regards to recruitment of mentors when they state that "simply being a 'good teacher' is not enough, for mentoring is not a straightforward extension of being a school-teacher" (p. 66). Fletcher (2000) advocates the establishment of a finely tuned and established cohort of experienced cooperating mentor teachers that would provide support for novice cooperating teachers over an extended period of time:

> It is unrealistic to expect a teacher to become an expert mentor in one short training session. There should be a network of support in school for a new mentor -- a sharing of ideas, skills and personal support that puts professional development of all staff at the heart of what a school does. (p. 9)

My experience, and an experience agreed to by most in the cohort, would validate this observation. While initially hesitant, most potential cooperating teachers become much more agreeable to thinking about it once they learned that there will be information regarding the role and its responsibilities provided to them within weekly discussion sessions.

In order to further encourage potential cooperating mentor teachers, a number of suggestions garnered much attention. Two approaches were to encourage those who were considering the role to become partially involved with the existing field experience by hosting the half-day observation student teachers or to facilitate or become involved in a teacher symposium format over a lunch hour or after school, where teacher candidates might have the opportunity to seek advice from either beginning teachers or those not currently involved in supervising a student teacher. Many of the action research cohort stated that they had observed that hesitant classroom teachers, once given an opportunity to become involved with this type of activity, were more willing to consider themselves as mentor cooperating teachers in future field experience rounds. By seeing themselves as mentors for either the lunch hour or for a morning a week, many current cooperating teachers have stated to cohort members that it was a "good place to start" (Jackie, June 6, 2001).

Screening Existing Cooperating Teachers

The very nature of the role of School Coordinator seemed to place many of the cohort in a precarious professional position of being not only a recruiter of potential cooperating teachers, but also the evaluator of existing preservice - inservice mentoring practices. This delicate fourth issue, while discussed earlier in this section, requires greater detail at this time, for it relates directly to changing expectations of field experience. These changes have proven to be most troublesome, for assessing cooperating teacher competence received a tremendous amount of discourse during the study. As one member of the cohort, who wished to remain anonymous while voicing this concern, tentatively asked, "What happens when we encourage a teacher to become a cooperating mentor teacher, which they do, and then it is discovered that they fulfill the role's requirements poorly?" (March 13, 2001).

Underlying the above concern are the very real political consequences involved within the process of having a peer who, while acting as a school coordinator, initiates an informal field experience assessment for each placement within their host school. This duality of

both promoting the role of school coordinator among teaching peers and evaluating those same professional counterparts proved to be a very problematic issue for a number of the action research cohort.

A second member of the cohort shared the story of being caught in the middle of a difficult relationship concern between a student teacher "who had been coached to expect a more collegial relationship with the mentor" and a cooperating teacher that "insisted on perpetuating an apprenticeship model" (anonymous cohort member A, May 3, 2000). Demonstrating not only the required professionalism of a veiled account of the situation as well as the art of subtle intervention on behalf of a student teacher, this cohort member, an active cooperating teacher, explained that she entered into the dialogue with the cooperating teacher by asking for a belief statement about mentoring preservice teachers,

> .... at one point I asked [the cooperating teacher in question], as we were in the coffee room and there was no one else around ... ,
> 'What is your philosophy when dealing with student teachers?'
>
> And [she] said ... ,
> 'You know it's the real thing, so you have to be really tough!!'
>
> So I said ... ,
> 'You know different people have different philosophies' (anonymous cohort member A, May 3, 2000).

Another cohort member, who at the time was also acting as a school coordinator while a classroom teacher, broached the diplomatically awkward issue of excluding an existing cooperating teacher from further mentoring opportunities by first securing the help of the school administrator.

> I'm responsible for recruiting [and evaluating] cooperating teachers. There were a couple of teachers that, ... perhaps, ... shouldn't have gotten student teachers at this point in their career. Trying to be diplomatic about it ... but I was thinking of the student teachers.
>
> I worked with our principal because I didn't want to be the one who was responsible for saying who did and who didn't [get a student teacher]. So

> we [the principals and I] got together and had a conversation [with the teacher in question] like, 'Seeing as you have had the opportunity' .... (anonymous cohort member B, March 1, 2000)

Regardless of the outcome, the stress of selecting and then evaluating the cooperating teacher's work as a mentor continued to be paramount in the minds of many school coordinators. Preservice teacher education researchers and authors such as Brooks and Sikes (1997) validate these feelings with the following statement, "selecting the 'right' people is crucial. Not everyone can, or should, be a mentor" (p. 66).

Pre-Field Experience Gatherings with Student Teachers

The fourth subsection within this chapter dealing with attitudes and what constitutes practice explores the cohort's understanding of the importance of pre-field experience gatherings with student teachers. As such, a great deal of discourse energy was generated within the action research cohort with regards to establishing communication links between the student teacher, the cooperating teacher and the host school earlier, rather than later or not at all, in the field experience. In her role as University Facilitator during the 2000/2001 school year, Beth spoke of opening her home to nearly a dozen student teachers. Her rationale for doing so follows:

> I wanted them to know me. I wanted them to know I was there to support them. I didn't know much of my role -- what was their expectations of me. Let them know what I was going to do for them. (Beth, May 15, 2001)

During this informal pre-field experience social event, Advanced Professional Term (nine week) and Introductory Professional Term (four week) student teachers were invited to come together to discuss issues of concern over food and drink. While the social lasted but an hour and a half, as Beth spoke of the evening, I could detect that something soulful (Palmer, 1998) had occurred in the preparation and enjoyment of a meal together much as it had within the cohort:

> To hear what the student teachers had to say was really important.

> To hear what the student teachers had to say was really important. Because they were feeling so overwhelmed. I learned how important it was to bring all my student teachers together informally before their field experience. I had all my student teachers from both my schools meet together. By the end of the meeting they were creating a list of phone numbers, addresses and e-mails and were planning to get together in two weeks. So there were three groups, from two schools, getting together to share ideas. And it made them feel like a team, [it helped] create a little bit of trust. As soon as the APT's arrived[3] they were part of the team. The APT's really took care of the IPT's .... (Beth, May 15, 2001)

It seemed as if, in preparing to nourish each individual with a meal, truthful communication and the expression of ideals had fed the spirit as well. This cohesion within the cohort allowed for information, ideas and concerns to be shared between student teachers, who despite being stationed within two different elementary schools, stayed in close contact with each other not only during the field experience, but long after it concluded.

A participant member, while not making her home available, opened the school in which she worked as both a school coordinator and principal to the student teachers before the actual field experience dates. The following quotation is from a school coordinator, who, at the time, was also the principal of her site, and who attests to her feelings of inclusion, when she openly asks student teachers to the school before the commencement date of the field experience:

> I invite them [to the school], before it [the field experience] starts, just so that they can find the building so they don't arrive late on their first day and make a bad impression and stuff like that. But I *call them* personally. I *call them* myself. I *call them* and ask them *what day would be good for them to come* and visit and we do a formal orientation but they can come on their own and just talk to me by themselves or come visit and then

[3] When Beth refers to the APT's arriving, she is referring to the fact that while both field experiences overlap, the IPT students actually set foot in the schools prior to the arrival of the APT's. Because of this it has often been observed that the IPT students received more of the up-front attention from the school coordinator. The APT students, who arrive nearly two weeks later, are often left to receive an on-site orientation that is either abbreviated, because they are further along in the program, or non existent for it is felt that they can fend for themselves within the school environment.

come on the full day. (A.M. November 4, 1999, speaker's emphasis)

By asking student teachers what day would be good for them to come, she was subtly yet effectively requesting that she meet with them before the fact, a point she readily admitted later in the conversation. Which led me to question, 'Was the subtle yet implied pressure placed on student teachers to visit their host school before the commencement date of their field experience fair?' Or was it an overt act of hospitality?

Regardless of the date or location of these unofficial and informal first visits with student teachers, a number of cohort members discussed the importance of extending an invitation to the university facilitator to join the discussions as well. In order for this to occur, it was agreed that plenty of lead up time would be needed to confirm the availability of all members of the cohort. This lead up time, it was hoped, would allow for three themes to emerge -- the opportunity to change perceptions within student teachers, the ability to listen to teacher candidates and the opportunity for continued dialogue during field experience -- all of which will be discussed within the next three subcategories.

Changing Perception within Student Teachers

Just as cooperating teachers and the entire school staff need to appreciate that teacher candidates can provide gifts of energy and enthusiasm to host school cultures, it is important that student teachers perceive themselves as bringing valuable contributions to the school community. These pre-field experience gatherings with student teachers were deemed to be an excellent venue to begin such relationships. Marlene commented on such an understanding when she stated that she had observed meaningful contributions to the life of and work within the school:

> Student teachers give back something to the school and the teachers see value in what student teachers have to offer. (Marlene, March 1, 2000)

Lynn tells the story of how staff at her school would respond when a large group of

EDFX 200 students would join the staff for once-a-week visits.

> Everyone is thinking about student teachers. Even if it is for a short period of time, they are reflecting on their practice. They are thinking ... 'The students are coming. What am I doing this period?'
>
> They are planning and taking those extra steps and they are continuing to do that, even though it was for a short period of time. It made them look at their teaching differently. (Lynn, May 22, 2001)

These contributions, albeit abbreviated due to the length of the field experiences, may change the working life of a school if the teacher candidate is allowed the flexibility to seek out areas to which they feel they can make contributions.

Listening to Teacher Candidates

These suggested pre-field experience gatherings were also seen as an opportunity to begin to carefully listen (Miller et al, 1979) to the wants and needs of teacher candidates. In addition to the before mentioned contributions, the group understood the necessity to stop and listen to teacher candidates instead of assuming to know what they want or need. Fletcher (2000) supports this position by suggesting that

> [w]hen novice teachers are asked to identify the single most important skill for a mentor to possess, they tend to choose the ability to listen. In the survival stage it is tempting to offer quick-fix tips but this alone does not move the trainee to become a professional. The mentor must be capable of listening, sizing up the situation and offering appropriate action, advice and sometimes, silence. (p. 9)

If student teachers are going to be encouraged to voice their concerns, comments and/or questions, then cooperating mentor teachers and school coordinators must practice careful listening (Miller et al, 1979) that communicates the "gifts of care and concern" (Hanna, 1995, p. 66). This is where the acknowledgement of intuitive skills of responding to the sense is critical for a professionally collaborative relationship to be developed. Sherry articulated her insight and beliefs in relationship building through

questions when she shared the following story:

> About three years ago I started having them [student teachers] again and the first thing that I asked them, when they came, was, 'Tell me what you are learning at University' ... because I thought that I was able to help them ... meet their needs... and that we could talk the same language ... the jargon is different ... . (Sherry, May 5, 2000)

By engaging in meaning making dialogue with student teachers, Sherry allowed preservice teachers in her care to ask questions of her. As the concept of mutual reciprocity dictated, each student teacher then understood that she would begin to ask questions of them.

This story was profoundly affecting, for I never had asked the student teachers, or the university facilitator associated with the school, for a description of what was being learned on campus prior to the field experience or what knowledge the student teacher had acquired prior to that moment in time. Instead I proceeded with my site-based field experience program. I can no longer pretend to know what they want as I can no longer assume to know what they need!

After asking an open-ended unbounded question, the cohort decided that a time of "waiting patiently and listening carefully" to the responses needed to occur -- listening not only to what is being said verbally, but also listening carefully to the classroom and the multitude of non-verbal messages that are being expressed within the learning environment. This disharmony of inconsistent non-verbal messages being sent by student teachers was addressed by Lynn, who posed the reflective questions on May 22, 2001, 'What are the student teachers saying, by either their actions or their words, in such situations?' and 'Are they asking for greater freedom within the room or are they requesting more information and support?'

It would seem that the craft of being a cooperating mentor teacher (Keanie, 2001) requires the mentor to calibrate independence within the specific learning environment, according to the communication established between the two people. Rowley (1999),

acknowledges this tendency:

> Good mentor [cooperating] teachers recognize that each mentoring relationship occurs in a unique, interpersonal context. ... Just as good teachers adjust their teaching behaviours and communication to meet the needs of individual students, good mentors adjust their mentoring communication to meet the needs of individual mentees. (p. 21)

Lynn stated there is a tendency to "rescue the learning by jumping in [to the lesson]" (Lynn, May 22, 2001). Beth, while explaining the harmony between calculated neglect and timely support, offered much the same opinion, when she stated, "There is a fine balance between guiding them [student teachers] and letting them go too much" (Beth, May 15, 2001).

Fostering Continued Dialogue during Field Experience

Perhaps no other suggestion provided as much discussion and transcripted material as this third subcategory, fostering continued dialogue by hosting weekly meetings with student teachers during their field experience. The importance of these gatherings was lost on me until hearing the cohort's testimonials and suggestions. In their research article regarding student teaching concerns, both Beth and Lynn cite their rationale for scheduling weekly meetings as being based on the need to build community among the student teachers,

> We believe that student teacher cohort meetings support collegial interactions and promote a sense of trust that is built through common shared experiences. For this reason, time was set aside to give student teachers an opportunity to meet to reflect on their practices. (Arnold & Robinson, 1999, p. 17)

As the only member of the group to have been a party to the weekly meetings as a student teacher, the cohort often looked to Ninele to provide first-person narrative accounts of these cohort meetings. On one such occasion Ninele reminisced on the value she placed on those discussions with her student teacher colleagues,

> Those once-a-week meetings were just so very encouraging. Because we sat around and ... we sort of supported each other and [the University Facilitator] would come in and *he was just so supportive and encouraging.* (Ninele, May 3, 2000, speaker's emphasis)

Yurick concurred that these meetings were perhaps the most powerful, reflective opportunity afforded to prospective teachers. While citing his detailed examination of field experience practices within three existing Collaborative Initiative Schools, he stated that "these weekly conversations could very well be the last time that student teachers are afforded an opportunity to sit and talk with peers about their teaching" (November 30, 2000). Mark's comment begs the question, 'How can efforts be made to ensure that all teachers have the opportunity to talk about their teaching?'

Despite Ninele's persuasive personal account and Yurick's validation through research, the cohort discussed the fact that many student teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with the idea of cohort meetings interfering with their field experience, especially if weekly meetings were scheduled during class time. The experiences of attempting to pull preservice teachers together for these collaborative discussions, as verified by many within the research cohort, testify that many novice teachers, perhaps detecting the first taste of developing a teacher identity, may not wish to vacate the classroom. The common lament cited by the cohort from student teachers seemed to be, 'There's so much to learn and so little time during each field experience to learn it all. I can't afford the time to come!'

This concern must be understood. While Wollman-Bonilla (1997) suggested that successful mentoring programs may be as beneficial to protégés, such programs are worthwhile only if members interpret them as being worthwhile and make the effort to attend. The proposed weekly meeting during the field experience must be seen as having value and benefit to the teacher candidates, for as Wilkinson (1997) noted:

> Mandatory induction programs have disappointed many beginning [or in this case preservice] teachers because they have failed to provide them with the supportive assistance and guidance they need to ease their

transition into the profession. (p. 66)

Therefore the question under consideration within the group, voiced by Joe Norris as he spoke to the action research cohort, became, "How do we get a group of student teachers together for meeting times during the field experience?" (J. Norris, October 5, 2000, p. 3).

The answers, therefore, to both the comments and the questions stated above may be found within the supportive tone established within the initial cohort building meeting before the field experience. Building on the momentum created within the founding session may alleviate the hesitancy of student teachers to make themselves available for subsequent meetings.

Intentional Cohort Building through Weekly Conversations

Throughout the action research discussions, the theme of changing the way our profession discusses all educational issues, including the profound concerns and/or problems of how we relate to student teachers during field experiences, was repeatedly addressed. This subsection draws together many of the cohort members' discoveries. To pause for a moment and engage in reflective conversation with another teacher about anything, let alone improving professional practice regarding mentoring, is a luxury seldom afforded to classroom teachers -- or a luxury very few teachers feel they can afford, for they may feel they have little time to stop the doing of teaching (J. Norris, personal communication, October 5, 2000). Tom (1997) supports this professional imperative to establish discourse and has suggested that "dialogue is presumed to be the central means for continually reassessing a diagram for change" (p. 191).

Therefore the capacity for both problem resolution and professional change may be located by both modeling, and then encouraging, collegial discourse among professionals. Conversely, squandered opportunities for discourse are problematic not only for mentor teachers but also for the teaching profession, for they set a dangerous precedent for observant novice teachers. As noted by one participant,"Is the message being sent to our young teachers that to be a successful teacher one must be busy all of the time?" (L.PW,

November 18, 1999).

For this migration away from the act of 'doing' student teaching to occur, there needs to be a facilitation of dialogue, not only with student teachers but with their cooperating teachers. Fletcher (2000) also expresses her concern for the lack of conversation in the workplace of cooperating teachers and has pointed out that:

> Most mentors do not even talk about their mentoring to anyone else on a day-to-day basis. They do not share their successes and they do not share their problems. If mentoring is to have status, to have the recognition it deserves, it must be understood. (p. 44)

As illustrated throughout this document, the ability to search for professional answers that will not only elevate the status of mentoring but also lead to changing the current methods of instructing preservice teachers can not be found as one privately ruminates over competence concerns while perpetuating the survival mode behind closed classroom doors. Wollman-Bonilla (1997) supports the use of dialogue as a change agent for existing field experience practices when she quotes a cooperating teacher from one of her studies, "'You know, we sit in these little cloistered [class]rooms, we don't know if we're doing it right. Interaction is always good'" (p. 5).

Facilitating the Opportunity for Professional Growth

The concept of weekly meetings garnered tremendous support among the action research group, and it was agreed that the need to discuss student teacher issues with cooperating teachers should continue once the student teachers arrive at each host school. Many participants reported that being a part of the action research cohort allowed them to experience the prosperity of shared dialogue, a craft that members of this the action research cohort could take back to their host schools and into proposed weekly gatherings with cooperating teachers. Lynn echoed this sentiment by stating that:

> All the things we talked about in our research group have filtered back into weekly discussions [with either student teachers or cooperating teachers]

at the school. (Lynn, May 22, 2001)

The importance of creating small niches of collegial discourse among cooperating teachers was highlighted by Beth, "I think everyone benefits, absolutely everyone, especially the cooperating teachers because even they don't get a chance to talk to each other ... I think [weekly meetings] is a wonderful idea" (Beth, October 5, 2000). With that being said, the question asked within the cohort was, 'How do we create a place for professional conversations within our schools?' (Ninele, October 5, 2000).

Pragmatically speaking, the place and time for this form of dialogue between cooperating teachers already exists within our host school environment and is bequeathed to us courtesy of the young potential educators who present themselves each term in the form of preservice teachers! For dialogue between teachers to occur, a change in understanding on the part of cooperating teachers needs to happen. A change that sees value in coming together to address concerns as well as a willingness shown by cooperating teachers to leave their classrooms in the hands of student teachers for as little as 30 minutes per week. Unfortunately, members of the cohort noted that some cooperating teachers may express either disapproval at relinquishing classroom control or there may be mentor teachers who have concerns about abandoning student teachers to attend such meetings.

As either a site-based field experience coordinator or a university facilitator at multiple host schools I was privy to hearing the same legitimate uncertainties, first expressed by student teachers about the 'lack of time for teaching', also being voiced by their cooperating teachers, "[t]here's so much to teach and so little time during each field experience to teach it all. I can't afford the time to come to meetings!" Because of these concerns I, along with many of the action research cohort, went searching for possibilities -- and reframed our question, 'How do we get a group of cooperating teachers to come together for a meeting time?'

Cooperating Teacher Re-Education

While it sounds exceedingly unilateral and goes against the democratic edict of the action

research orientation (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997), many of the cohort felt that a dictatorial stance was necessary in order to establish the first weekly pattern. Beth demonstrated this forthrightness with her following statement:

> I'm insisting ..... in fact, I've told my people that I must have a time where I meet the student teachers all together. And I must have a time where I meet with teachers all together as well. Because last time they wouldn't do it. (Beth, January 30, 2001)

A participant affirmed her intention to initiate the weekly meeting for cooperating teachers with the following declaration, "Probably for next year what I would do is I would schedule myself in" (S.S. April 28, 2000). This same participant also mentioned the importance of selling the inservice as a way for busy cooperating teachers to get ideas, for it was noted in the action research cohort that "new ideas are the lifeblood of projects such as the Collaborative Schools Initiative" (Armstrong et al, 1998, p. 247). Still another participant thought he would promote the idea of gathering in a vernacular that many teachers would understand and be comfortable with:

> It would be nice to have, I don't know, to have a *little inservice* for cooperating teachers every so often. Like it's been a while since I've been a student teacher *or* I've never had a student teacher or just somebody that would like to be able to write a little better evaluation or to get some new ideas for how to do the.... mentorship role, the cooperating teacher role. (S.D., April 12, 2000, speaker's emphasis)

While the before mentioned dictatorial imposition of weekly meetings was not universally sanctioned by the cohort, its relationship building objectives and educational value were. Sherry wishing to establish weekly dialogue links with cooperating teachers, framed her invitation for the initial gathering as a desire to be 'of service' to her peers by not only offering assistance but facilitating proactive arrangements for whole school classroom inter-visitations:

> Making myself available ... ,
> 'How can I help?'

> You know, that sort of thing. Maybe talking with them [cooperating teachers] directly, every week, as the field experience goes along. 'Is there anyone that you think your student [teacher] should visit?'
>
> Then in the next week set it up for them [either the student teacher or the cooperating teacher]. Rather than waiting until the third week. Being a little bit more on top of it. (Sherry, May 5, 2000)

After much discussion, and according to examples shared among the action research cohort, weekly meetings became the norm within host schools where Beth, Jackie, Lynn, Marlene, Ninele and Sherry worked. They were highly successful. Despite expecting low turn out for the first meeting, many within the cohort reported a surprisingly large number of cooperating teachers in attendance, approximately 75%. Perhaps one reason why these weekly gatherings were well received is that, in the same way that student teachers had grown to consider their weekly sessions valuable to attend, so too did cooperating teachers, once they had been asked to attend the first meeting. The structure, duration and timing of the first meeting was deemed critical if successive meetings were the goal. Others within the cohort, myself included, ruminated on what form these meetings should take. After experiencing the action research cohort discussions, it was appreciated that our gatherings with cooperating teachers should carry over from our discussions within the cohort and that, "[i]n a community of truth, knowing and teaching and learning look less like General Motors and more like town meetings, less like a bureaucracy and more like bedlam" (Palmer, 1998, p. 101).

For many within our cohort these sessions eventually came to be seen as mini-professional development for cooperating teachers. Jackie, while testifying to their effectiveness, also broached the topic of timely and worthy cooperating teacher education, with the following statement, "The weekly meeting is like a weekly mini-refresher course on how to be a cooperating teacher" (Jackie, June 6, 2001).

Another cohort member also expressed her support for the concept of creating greater understanding among cooperating teachers in the form of a session or classes to be offered by the Faculty of Education (U of A):

> I personally feel that this group has been so valuable. I think it would be helpful for other people [cooperating teachers] who haven't had a connection, even if it is a one-time meeting to discuss possibilities. I think it would be a really nice thing for the University [of Alberta] to offer. (LPW, May 8, 2000)

Lynn, speaking from the experience of facilitating these meetings within her former host school, also expanded the cohort discussion by including an educationally based question, "How can we, in meetings with cooperating teachers, stress where [the student teachers] are in their growth as a teacher?" (Lynn, May 22, 2001).

Perhaps another reason for the success was that the cohort members had honoured the requests of both stakeholders with regards to timing within the school day and consistently within the week. Marlene, Beth and Lynn observed that the best attendance for either meeting occurred at the start of the school day, with teacher candidates gathering for no more than 30 minutes and adjourning at least 15 minutes before the start of class.

When meeting with cooperating teachers, the best attendance was received when the meetings were scheduled during instruction time. Many cohort members shared that this not only allowed them uninterrupted time to articulate their intentions with each other, they also felt they could use the non-instruction time to mentor their student teacher(s). An example of this form of schedule was provided by Beth and Lynn's school: a mutually agreed upon schedule was developed that saw a student teacher meeting held from 8:00 am to 8:30 am. At that time the student teachers then returned to their classrooms to finish preparing for the day. Once classes commenced at 8:45 am, the cooperating teachers then convened for a 30-minute gathering. At 9:15 am the University Facilitator was then ready to commence classroom observations for the rest of the morning or the day.

Remembering the University Facilitator -- The Forgotten Stakeholder

As mentioned previously, as the only member of the cohort to experience the weekly

discourse as a student teacher, Ninele emphasized this collegial support and testified to the value she placed in having the University Facilitator present during weekly discussions with her student teacher cohort:

> Those meetings were just so very encouraging. Because we sat around and ...we sort of supported each other and [the University Facilitator] would come in and he was just so supportive and encouraging. (Ninele, May 3, 2000)

Due in large part to the unflagging testimonials from Ninele, the cohort heard how the contributions of the University Facilitator are valuable, for he or she is a personification of the vital link between the field and the Faculty of Education (U of A). Many within the cohort also felt strongly that student teachers must be made aware of and appreciate the important advocating role these people fulfill. By the same token cooperating teachers can observe, first hand, the support of the undergraduate teacher education program and ask questions directly to the program. Many members of the action research group also validated that a particularly skilled or experienced University Facilitator may also act as a mentor to a novice school coordinator.

To better ensure University Facilitator attendance at the meetings, it was strongly suggested to schedule both the student teacher and then the cooperating teacher cohort meetings on the day when the University Facilitators are expected to visit the host school. To help facilitate the scheduling of the day's events for the University Facilitator, it was recommended that student teachers be encouraged to assume responsibility for scheduling the weekly observations. In this way the student teachers would be encouraged to talk among themselves and decide on an observation schedule that works best for them that week. It was also proposed that a student teacher assume responsibility for coming to the meeting with the schedule already confirmed. This delegation of obligation proved most successful. Marlene, speaking in the voice of her most current role as University Facilitator, supported this process: "[y]ou can spend your time on important ideas instead of making schedules" (Marlene, April 11, 2001). Once the gathering was completed, cooperating teachers would then meet to discuss issues or concerns. With the adjournment of this meeting the classroom visits would

commence.

Ideas-in-Action During Field Experiences

In the same way that "Dewey believed that the only real source of knowledge was found in action, not in armchair speculation" (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 73), I have come to appreciate that "action research provides a way of working which links theory and practice into the one whole: Ideas-in-action" (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1997, p. 6). While I too would argue that "[r]ecipes are *too easy* to implement and for that reason they too often result in practices that are grafted onto a school without significantly influencing the school for very long" (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 5), I also have attempted to demonstrate that ideas become fads when not supported by academic rigour.

Due to the cyclical nature of hosting pre-service teachers, with student teachers being "intensely present" (Beth, April 2000) for a relatively short period of time and then gone until the next wave of teacher candidates arrives midway through the next term, many members expressed concern that it is easy to forget what one has learned with regards to field experience programming and hosting whole school activities or events (Marlene, March 2001). While action research may be considered neopragmatic in outlook and, to a certain extent, in design (Greenwood & Levin, 1998), the previously introduced six cohort members therefore felt it critical to document the best practices (Lynn, October 5, 2001) discussed around the table. They hoped that these testimonials may eventually influence a broader range of participants and potentially, Faculty of Education (U of A) policies.

When ideas are discussed openly and without hesitation, ideals can not be far behind. It is this promise of the possible that continued not only to inspire me but, as the final section of this chapter will attest, to motivate cohort members as well. Comments such as the preceding one will continue to be highlighted throughout this chapter, for they reflect how each participant was thinking either previous to, during or at the conclusion of the study. In many cases the cohort comments display how each cohort member felt towards working with, no, learning alongside student teachers because of the discussion that occurred within our action research cohort. The next subsection, therefore,

documents the attitudinal migration to as the cohort became more critically informed and reflective.

These recollections, therefore, are presented is this subsection not only because they have proven to be both effective and efficient among my cohort peers, but because we now more fully recognize their educational merit and the academic rationale underpinning the practice. These recollections or themes of working with students *during* their field experience are explored more deeply in the following sub-section: exploring the importance of first perceptions and impressions, realizing that student teachers require varying amounts of time when acclimating to the new surroundings and finally examining the preferred ongoing evaluative process.

First Perceptions and Impressions

While many educational researchers have proposed that the cornerstones of a teacher identity are laid down through years of being "in school" as a child (Britzman, 1991), I would argue that for many prospective teachers the foundation of a career choice as an educator is built upon when they are first introduced to existing staff members once in a host school.

Over the course of the study, many cohort members spoke of their ambition to welcome visiting teacher candidates not only into their host school, but also, in the words of Jackie, "properly" into the occupation itself, for they felt that a student teacher's preeminent impression of the profession would take place with their first steps within a host school. Therefore, the underlying question, often discussed with the action research cohort, and explored fully within this subsection is, 'Where does the relationship building and professional identity of an emergent teacher begin?'

It was also discussed that if student teachers are invited to attend a particular host school, it would, according to Ninele, "seem only proper that a staff member would be there to greet them at the front door and see them in" (Ninele, May 3, 2000). This introductory groundwork of welcoming novice teachers into the host school, and therefore the

groundwork of welcoming novice teachers into the host school, and therefore the profession, was deemed critical during field experience. Many within the action research cohort spoke of this rapport being strengthened, either individually or collectively in a cohort, when novice professionals are greeted with either a handshake at the front entrance or a personalized introduction using their first name. Lynn, who in her role as a school coordinator for four years, met a total of nearly 150 student teachers, also shared her rationale for greeting student teachers at the door on their first day to her host school:

> To make sure that there is someone that they can connect with, so they don't have that feeling that they are on their own or that they can't ask questions. Encourage them to be asking questions about the teaching and learning they observe. (Lynn, May 22, 2001)

The courteous and caregiving interaction of greeting novice teachers has also been commented on by many student teachers throughout this research. The profound importance of the social act as it pertains to acceptance and eventual collegial support was not lost on one particular student teacher as she made public a journal entry, which was scribed while in the middle of an IPT field experience:

> Conditions within the school need to be ripe for reinforcement and acceptance. Student teachers need to feel themselves as valued members of the school ecosystem. Perhaps the most critical aspect of the socialization of student teachers is collegial support. (T.H. April 10, 2001)

While some within the action research cohort would voice concern that this is not practical -- considering "that student teachers arrive at different times" (R. Preece, personal communication, June, 2002) on their first day to a new school -- others, including my mentor and former cooperating teacher Robin Preece, would counter that something as close to a personal greeting as possible "must be the goal!" (R. Preece, personal communication, June, 2002). A suggestion that could alleviate this concern was later generated by a recent education graduate, himself a mature student who, despite the confidence of both numerous degrees and multiple opportunities to teach adult learners at colleges, still felt uneasy entering a host grade-school for the first time:

> That walk through the door is an anxiety-ridden experience. It's crucial for a 'greeter' to be there. Maybe a substitute [supply teacher] could be booked to free-up a staff member for a half day or the first period, just so that person could be at the disposal of the student teacher. (M.O. July 30, 2002)

Professional Relationships with Student Teachers

The action research cohort also spent a considerable amount of time discussing ways to alleviate the stresses many prospective teachers associate with initiating a field experience. As early as the first session of the second cycle, November 4th, 1999, the significance of the recursive theme of encouraging the development of professional relationships within the school in general and, specifically, the staffroom was being discussed. This assertion is supported by educational researchers McNally, Cope, Inglis and Stronach (1997):

> The staffroom, then, was a setting for most student [teachers], in which they became part of the school. It was generally a relaxing environment in which they heard individual stories about children and classes, but where they developed a feeling of the whole current running through the school where they seemed to absorb the ethos of the school, and to be absorbed into the culture of the school ... (p. 494)

The construction, and subsequent reinforcement of a sense of belonging within the host school for student teachers was an obvious goal for many within the action research cohort and a recurrent theme. Referring once again to the exemplary job carried out in her dual role as school coordinator, Lynn shared her vision with the following statement,

> One of our[4] first things is when our students come in we really want them to feel part of our team, to establish that sense of belonging right away (February 22, 2001).

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[4] It is important to note the use of the word *our* in her opening statement, as it refers both to her aforementioned partnership with Beth and to the rest of her host school staff.

While discussing the benefits of establishing collegial, friendly relationships with student teachers, the action research cohort also addressed the potential for the systematically dismantling of professional relationships within the hallways, staffroom or faculty common room. While many student teachers voiced stories of positive relationship building experiences during their various field experience rounds, a number either within the student teacher forums or individually, also shared candid stories of less than welcoming greetings upon arrival, or of being made to feel excluded and perhaps even alienated throughout their field experiences. The journal entry of one student teacher expressed such disappointment,

> The current haphazard socialization of student teachers is an unfortunate reality of some teaching practicums. While some schools embrace the arrival of student teachers, there are still schools who consider the student teacher to be an intrusion and annoyance. This attitude fosters condescending relationships between the staff and the student teacher, causing an alienation that has detrimental effects on the student teacher's ability to view themselves as emergent professionals. The support of colleagues is essential for student teachers, as the way [I] conduct [myself] in the classroom is determined by the way [I am] seen within the school and the staffroom. (S.P. April 10, 2001).

To counteract the detrimental effects of such testimonies, the cohort dedicated considerable discussion time and additional energies to the construction of "positive relationships with student teachers." Lynn shared the following story:

> So whether it's a muffin morning or meeting them for lunch during the first week when they first come in, or someone is there to greet them at the door, or the name tags are ready. All that stuff is very important. (Lynn, Feb 22, 2001)

For nearly 18 months, the topics of welcoming -- accepting -- feeding -- greeting, as well as the profound importance of identifying individual student teachers by name, was discussed within the action research cohort as highlighted with Sherry's testimony:

> I just jotted down name tags as an idea for myself. It took me a long time

> to realize the importance of this suggestion. There were two, four weekers [I.P.T field experience teachers] that I kept mixing up their names. It was just horrible! Looking at Stephen's name tag .... we have ours from our school but the student teachers don't have any. (Sherry, November 4, 1999)

This last comment regarding the readiness of name tags proved pivotally important to many within the action research cohort, for it verified our previous observations of the importance of name recognition between teaching staff and student teachers. However, upon further discussion within the student teacher forums, the importance that name tags played in creating a cohort among student teachers was also stressed. They too needed to know each other's names. Fueled with this recent understanding, in my role as University Facilitator, I acquired University of Alberta self adhesive-style name tags and had each prospective teacher within my host school cohort place their recently filled in name tags, with the backing still attached, into plastic slip cover lapel pins. This way the student teacher name tags were reused each school visit and returned to be recycled at the conclusion of the field experience.

Other members of the action research cohort who incorporated this method also reported that host school staff expressed appreciation for the university designated name tags, for it decreased security concerns and allowed teaching staff more easily to accept student teachers in the classroom. The theme of acceptance of student teachers is clearly voiced when the same former student teacher who commented earlier regarding the supply teacher for the greeting teacher, also shared that seeing his name assigned [both] to a personalized mailbox within the office [and a 'waiting' name tag] had made a "very professional impression" on him -- an impression that he shared with me nearly a year after the presumably trivial event (M.O. July 30, 2002).

Personal Introduction and Public Welcomes

The importance of name recognition to counteract the "current haphazard socialization of student teachers" into host schools continued to be the emphasis of discussion as the cohort shared their understanding of the need for a warm and welcoming initial greeting to

the entire school population, including students. As one intermittent action research participant, herself a teacher at a junior high school, suggested:

> And when they [student teachers] come in, our principal puts it in the news bulletin [morning announcements] and the newsletter ... the names of the student teachers.
> "We'd like to welcome our student teachers",
>
> ... so that everyone knows what's going on. It's on the announcements and stuff and I think people are really good about making sure the kids know about the student teachers so that they feel welcome. (S.VB. May 8, 2000)

It was also noted that the introduction of student teachers, and the University Facilitator, need not be confined to the morning announcements. Another member of the cohort testified to the importance of personal introductions during a school-wide gathering with her statement:

> Introduce them at assembly. That helps.... we do birthdays and new kids, but new adults in the building should be introduced as well. (A.M. November 4, 1999)

In my role as University Facilitator I have had the immense pleasure of being introduced, along with the student teachers who were starting their field experience, at an assembly in Beth and Lynn's elementary school. I can attest to how pleasant it was to be publicly acknowledged for the role I fulfilled within the school. I can also testify that once the introductions were completed, during the following visit I was greeted by name as I entered the classrooms during my facilitation visits[5]. One particular student teacher also commented that being introduced by their last name assisted in making their role as teacher "more official" (T. M., March 15, 2000) within the school.

This same student teacher then commented that the personal introductions and public welcome allowed her to move more freely and feel more accepted within the host school.

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[5] It is important to note that I was asked if I would like to be introduced before the actual event! This courtesy was noted and will be replicated within my practice as a school coordinator.

For this prospective teacher acceptance took the form of both public introductions to classroom students using the student teacher's last name, followed by a private chat in which the classroom teacher would initiate communal dialogue using their first name.

Acclimating to the New School Landscape

The theme of acceptance and comfort of student teachers within a host school continued to be a focus point for discussion during the first few action research cycles. Regardless of when their first day occurs, once in the host schools, the reception each teacher candidate receives was treated with a compelling reverence and a great deal of respect from the action research cohort, with a tremendous amount of discussion effort being spent on ensuring that each teacher candidate was afforded the opportunity to acclimate to their new surroundings. Citing a survey of 201 new teachers, Wilkinson (1997) proposes that, "every new teacher should have an orientation that includes information about the school facilities, rules and procedures, and the principal's expectations for teaching performance" (p. 68).

Print Documents -- Information Sources

To assist in this host school orientation, the action research cohort discussed effective and efficient modes of information dissemination to, or rather for, student teachers. An idea which garnered a great deal of attention was to create a document which outlines the protocols employed in both homeroom and the entire host school, a text similar to the (usually required) supply teacher plans. Many cohort members were impressed with this idea and began implementing it immediately. The words of one member reflect the enthusiasm,

> Somebody suggested just having a package ready for them. Which I thought was great! Having a package with a binder and little notes, and a map of the school and a little handbook and stuff ... that was awesome! I did that actually. It worked great. (S.VB. May 8, 2000)

Despite unanimous support for the need of such an information package, a few members

of the cohort voiced concerns that asking cooperating teachers to create such a package would lead to the cooperating teacher feeling overwhelmed, which may lead to resentment. A second cohort member, who was also the vice principal at the time, spoke of providing assistance to the cooperating teachers,

> I'm going to talk to my cooperating teachers and see if they would like me to help them generate that student teacher package. Right now each individual teacher does it on their own. That's a lot of work when much of the stuff may be similar. (S.S. April 28, 2000)

While the act of providing assistance may be considered extremely helpful and professional, a word of caution was also sounded in regards to the content of the material. A few within the cohort expressed concern that decisions regarding the package's content must not be misconstrued as being made primarily by the school coordinator. While some items such as a school map, staff directory of classroom phone numbers and supervision schedules are consistent, many within the action research cohort felt that there should be a place within the booklet where the individual cooperating teacher can personalize the document with classroom specific protocol. In this way the packages will not only contain information regarding school rules, it will also allow student teachers to preview the personal and professional beliefs underpinning a teacher's classroom practices. For example the same participant who earlier had expressed enthusiasm for implementing the document also spoke of using the booklet as a discussion starter with her student teachers:

> I found I went over it with my student teacher during the first couple of days and it was really helpful. And I think they appreciated it too, because it gives them a little bit more of a sense of what is what in the school and what I believe my classroom should be like. Sort of a cultural overview of the school ... and my classroom. (S.VB. May 8, 2000)

To alleviate further the responsibility of creating multiple documents for each student teacher during each field experience round, it was recommended to encourage preservice teachers to make photocopies of whatever pages they deem critical for their success before returning the complete folder once their field experience has concluded. Then,

because of its generic nature, the documents could be recycled for the next cohort of student teachers with any necessary changes.

While the creation of a document received favourable response, the content of it also received attention. During his session with the action research cohort, Yurick cited examples from his doctoral research (2000) involving five highly regarded school coordinators, who each created host school documents. When asked if any had consulted the Faculty of Education (U of A) or taken into consideration the course content student teachers were experiencing while in their undergraduate classes, Dr. Yurick found that the answer was a consistent "no." He therefore became concerned for the apparent lack of collaboration within Collaborative School Initiative in regards to host school - Faculty of Education communication.

While I have endeavored to create this type of document for student teachers in the past, I feel very strongly that any future edition should result only after collaborative consultation with the campus-based course coordinators[6]. This is particularly important considering that courses within the IPT and APT terms are not only scripted to ready students for their field experience, but the majority are also timetabled so that they are completed before the student teachers embark on their field experience.

By having these discussions, a complementary approach to preservice teacher education can be initiated one that observes the generation and distribution of the materials or resources from within the campus based courses that lead up to the current field experiences. Included in this literature is the potential to share a resource list of the current texts being used in some of the more global courses. The availability of these could assist co-operating teachers who may wish to pursue or perhaps purchase the latest texts on specific course content such as classroom management, effective questions or assessment.

Of course the reciprocal of this concern is also true: the print material, or experiences

[6] The person typically responsible for overseeing both the course content and instruction of their course.

gained by student teachers during their field experiences should also be made available or known to the Faculty of Education (U of A) course instructors. An even more proactive stance, one that was discussed within the cohort, would see the creation of dialogue lanes between host schools and Faculty of Education instructors to share information and course content before, during and after each field experience. This suggestion led to questions from within the action research cohort, 'Who, within each institution, will be responsible for making this information available?' (Lynn, May 22, 2001) and 'Could a host school purchase or borrow copies of current undergraduate texts?' (Jackie, April 11, 2001).

Student Shadowing -- Understanding through Discourse

Another theme which ran throughout the action research cycles was the recommendation that navigating the new school should commence immediately and run throughout the entire length of the field experience instead of being tacked only in the final few weeks of a nearly completed field experience. One way which found favour was that the prospective teacher may be granted the freedom to navigate the host school with the assistance of a student -- a process which came to be known as student shadowing. One action research participant described his school's version of the event as follows:

> The student teachers shadow a student and walk around the school. We encourage them to watch what's going on in the other classrooms, not just the same subject. (S.D., November 4, 1999)

While the overt rationale for this event is to allow a classroom student from the host school to act as host for the recently arrived teacher candidate, as with many experiences that take place within a school, there is far more to the process than simply touring the layout of the facility. Being hosted by grade school students enables the teacher candidates to begin an invaluable initial discourse with members of the student population about the host school. If the novice teachers are encouraged to listen carefully and submerge themselves in the community of the school through the young learners, they may detect subtle nuances of the school and the lives of the students themselves. In this

situation the student teacher is then encouraged to converse with the young people and their circumstances within the classes and hallways of the school in the hopes of harvesting information. Reflection would then occur either with their student teacher peers or with any other adults in the building. In this way, at a still deeper level this immersion into the world of the host school learner may also be seen as both an introduction to being a reflective practitioner (Porter, 1998; Posner, 1993) as well as the first act of being an action researcher.

One proposal harvested through the research was the need for exclusive preliminary introductions between the host grade school student and the novice teacher before the actual shadowing takes place. I'm referring to the voice of a former student teacher, Delcy, who is now exploring the concept of becoming a cooperating teacher. Being one of the first informal interviews of this research, I've had the opportunity of sharing this vignette on several occasions. With each retelling I'm not only more convinced of the suggestion's merits, but also impressed with the author's candor and astuteness, for Delcy draws many profound insights that have since made their way into similar experiences at numerous other host schools.

> I think, if you're going to have us [student teachers] follow a student, I think we should have the student come out of the class for one period and show us around. Get them to show us the [host] school.
>
> I was in that classroom and I was in the class, so I was relearning Social nine and I couldn't ask questions, because I didn't want to be rude to the teacher. So I felt that all my questions were in transition between the Social and Language classes. And there was nothing I really could say. Like I think it's a really good idea but that's the only thing I would change.
>
> Have them come out of the classroom, meet us first privately do a school tour and then we could sit down and ask the critical questions like, 'What do you like about this school?' 'Why do you come to this school?' before we go back into the classroom. (Delcy, October 16, 1998)

Perhaps her most telling and influential comment came as our discussion was concluding when Delcy clearly articulated her need to ask questions while receiving information:

> Before all my observations were non-verbal. I couldn't ask any questions and *get the information I needed* to get to know them [the grade school students] (Delcy, October 16, 1998, speaker's emphasis).

Hearing Delcy explain her vision for an improved student shadow was a revelation, for it helped me move from thinking about what information to give to teacher candidates, to asking the questions, 'What information was actually required by the novice teacher?' and 'How can I be of service to helping them acquire it?'

Open the Door -- Stepping Within

The concern for student teachers acquiring needed information effectively and efficiently continued to resonate throughout the action research cohort. Once the student teachers have been greeted at the door, guided by a student throughout the building, and afforded an orientation package, the next community-building, whole school activity which was featured in discussion was the concept of having all classrooms open[7] to the student teachers. The original intent of this activity was to help student teachers seek their own information, whether that be increased technical knowledge of a specific subject area or classroom behaviours related to a certain grade or learning style. The genus of this undertaking came early in the second action research cycle, courtesy of Sherry, who throughout the study was afforded the unique opportunity of discussing field experience issues and concerns with both the action research group members and then again with multiple members of her family. After one such domestic discussion with a relative who was an IPT student at the time, Sherry entered the next cohort meeting and eagerly shared the concept of a whole school experience in which student teachers could migrate throughout the entire host school, visit individual classrooms, observe actual learning in progress and, when appropriate, engage both students and classroom teachers in discourse. Sherry's enthusiasm can be detected in the following explanation:

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[7] Classroom teachers who were administering tests, experiencing special situations or were uncomfortable with student teachers dropping in were asked to close their doors for the previously arranged period of time.

> ... little tour ... [and was] encouraged to just wander the school for a couple of hours that morning. Like walk into any classroom, they were invited ... open door ... into any room. They just wandered in and [the student teacher] said,
> 'I felt really comfortable there!' (Sherry, November 4, 2000).

From this testimonial the idea then took root and continued to be discussed within the cohort. A participant expressed their interest in a similar event three weeks later:

> Since the last time we met together, I've been thinking about this open door policy that one of the people mentioned. What they do is they have a certain day where the student teachers are free to roam to different teachers. I would imagine they could find out which ones will teach with their doors open, and the student teachers can come in. They don't have to sit through a whole class. It's a real informal observation but it still gives them a good feel for things. So I'm thinking, I might take that suggestion and bring it into play. We're talking here in the new year, for the next round to come. (S.S. November 18, 1999)

Hearing this suggestion for opening doors for student teachers within a host school, the talk around the cohort table quickly focused on how such an event could break the pre-existing "isolationist mentality" not only for those with thought of entering the field, but for those currently within the profession. The action research cohort spent considerable time discussing the importance of learning by observing other educators. This is a teaching right -- not a privilege -- that should be extended to all educators and not be confined to the preservice teachers. As many in the cohort pointed out however, by demonstrating the power of this type of discourse among student teachers, perhaps the next generation will insist on this type of open communication in their schools.

Another latent outcome of such a whole school experience for in-service teachers is the facilitation of cross-curricular visitation and the subsequent discourse necessary for either future curriculum integration with the same grade and/or the seamless transition between grades. Palmer (1998) refers to the encouragement of discourse among educators when he states, "We must observe each other teach, or at least occasionally -- and we must spend more time talking to each other about teaching" (p. 143).

In order for this cross-observational process to be facilitated, many cohort members spoke of needing to carefully script the event for two reasons, the first being that student teachers may be hesitant to relinquish their class time. Ninele cycled back to this concern of migration visitation for student teachers when she mentioned that she needed first to float the idea in the comfortable confines of the weekly meetings with student teachers. In Ninele's words, "We were able [in our weekly student teacher meetings] to encourage each other to go into each other's classrooms" (Ninele, May 3, 2000).

The second concern was a cautionary note with regards to keeping the communication lines open between student teachers and cooperating mentor teachers. The accountability issue was deemed by many as being critical to the success of the open door policy, and it was highly recommended that both student teachers and cooperating mentor teachers inform each other as to their location within the host school when either is out of the host classroom. One participant shared the story of a particular student teacher who chose to drift between their assigned classroom and other classrooms:

> I do remember encouraging him [the student teacher] to observe other classrooms. He did observe other student teachers teaching as well as other teachers. He occasionally didn't tell me where he was going to go. But he did [eventually work out the problem] and he made good use of that suggestion (S.D. June 11, 2001).

With both these concerns on the table, Ninele mentioned how, in her particular school setting, she had felt it important to orchestrate the movement of the student teachers as they traveled throughout the school:

> This time, rather than do it piecemeal, and I would've included more if things had worked out differently but I sent a student teacher off to the behaviour assistance program for a whole day. Then to the transition program for a whole day. So they get a sense of what the whole day was about. That I got from the group ... that they were constantly pulling, sending, going.... (Ninele, May 3, 2000)

Still later the theme of monitoring the classrooms which student teachers would visit was

also commented on when Sherry made the following observation:

> Someone had a sheet on the day that the student [teachers] came in on. There were outlines of the classrooms that would welcome you, and I think I'm going to do that. I think that is a non-threatening way to open more doors. (Sherry, May 5, 2000).

Brooks and Sikes (1997) discuss the importance of novice teachers working in conjunction with the school coordinators (and university facilitators) to generate both non-threatening and quality opportunities for school and profession exploration:

> [student teachers] should be helped to be proactive in seeking the experiences they need to further their development and the school's ITE [initial teacher education] programmer should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate an element of student-initiated learning. (p. 47)

This need for student teachers to be proactive in terms of facilitating their own learning is highlighted in one insightful EDFX 200 student reflection:

> My field experience [specifically the open door policy] provided me with an opportunity to observe other teachers teaching and maybe, more importantly, it allowed me to observe the same students being taught by different teachers. This observation allowed me to compare teachers and students both in behaviour and attitude. (T. H. April 10, 2001)

I give final word on student teachers assuming responsibility for partially scripting their field experiences to Bullough (1997) who states, "[o]ur intention was to create a responsive curriculum, one within which students [teachers] would feel a measure of ownership and find a place" (p. 24).

School Keys -- a Measure of Ownership, a Sign of Trust

A large component of feeling ownership and finding place within an educational environment can manifest itself in seemingly insignificant events like passing out inside master keys to each of the student teachers at the start of their field experience. Keys

connote freedom and power. In an educational setting keys may be seen by many student teachers as exemplifying professional respect. Assigning a single key to a student teacher could be interpreted as a symbolic gesture of professional trust, responsibility and acceptance and has been overwhelmingly received both by the cohort and their host schools. Many members of the cohort echoed the sentiments of a fellow collaborative School Initiative practitioner, who states, "I am guided by the feeling that student teachers should be treated with the same professional respect as any other professional on staff" (Armstrong et al, 1999, p. 244). Ninele, in particular, reiterated this thought quite humorously with the comment:

> I always get a key for my student teachers, because that's what grown ups have! They have keys!!! (Ninele, November 4, 1999).

The distribution of keys within a large school may constitute a serious security risk. Therefore it was suggested not only to wait to distribute keys to those student teachers who had agreed to commence their field experience at the host school, but also to withhold the official verification of the final evaluation until the individual has submitted their keys at the conclusion of the field experience.

Ongoing Evaluative Process

The process of evaluating student teacher progress presented itself within the first moments of the first session and continued to be a topic back to which the cohort conversation cycled. Each action research participant seemed to have a story to tell the others gathered around the table of concerns for the rather antiquated yet common process of punitive or ambush assessment. A participant spoke of how the information gained within the cohort had assisted him in rethinking the process of evaluating student teachers to feature a more collaborative and self reflective format:

> What I did last year, and I think this was a suggestion that came from here, is for the final evaluation .... I had the student teachers fill out the form, themselves first. Boy, did that get the ball rolling. Then I took some of my ideas and some of their ideas and I wrote it and I gave it back to them

> three or four days early. They then took it and reevaluated their final evaluation. Having something to piggy-back on dymystified the process! (S.D. October 5, 2000)

This testimonial towards empowering student teachers to take a more active role in appraising their professional growth during each field experience is supported by Brooks and Sikes (1997),

> Student teachers should be recognized as key partners in their own preparation and encouraged -- indeed, expected -- to take responsibility for aspects of their own learning and assessment. All too often, student [teachers] are passive, seeing the course as something which is done to them by others. From the outset, the expectation that they accept joint ownership of their professional development needs to be communicated (p. 47).

This same person then expressed how his experiences of expecting the novice teacher to become involved in assessing their own professional growth had been shared with a number of members of his school staff. This contract resulted in more teaching peers accepting student teacher input into their final evaluations and conversations about professional goals for growth. As mentioned at the top of this sub category, the assessment issue constituted a huge component of the dialogue among the six cohort membersp and it is only fitting to conclude this portion of the ideas-in-action segment with this simple, yet significant recommendation -- if site based preservice teacher educators wish to allow student teachers the grace to grow into the teacher role, then, as mentors, we must afford them the opportunity of evaluating themselves. In order to do this, cooperating teachers must dismantle the apprenticeship mentality. When this occurs, cooperating teachers will also need to be diligent in reminding teacher candidates not to judge themselves too harshly.

Chapter Synopsis

In this chapter I have highlighted the personal and professional growth within myself as I moved through the action research process. While exploring my growth, my primary focus has been the relationship building I feel is required before and during the field

experience among both host staff members and student teachers. The rationale for this community building, first separately and collectively, is the need to create linkages through dwelling places that will allow all members of the learning community the opportunity to grow professionally and personally while in the act of being either a mentor or a protégé.

The epilogue of this research document, therefore, may be seen as a recommendation guide and has been created with the hopes of providing the starting point for meaningful change with regards to field experience practices within host schools. Within this final section a number of suggestions for each stakeholder group has been outlined. These are based on the work of both the action research cohort and the current research literature regarding supervising student teachers.

EPILOGUE:

THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF CAREGIVERS

Over a two-and-a-half year period, seven site-based preservice teacher educators, myself included, regularly gathered together to explore issues related to supervising both student teachers and the people responsible for mentoring them. Using an action research orientation in the spirit of Kemmis & McTaggart (1997), we, along with the intermittent help of eight other classroom teachers, engaged in two dozen 90-minute discussion sessions between January 1999 and April 2001.

While we originally gathered together to gain information and make sense of the Whole School Experiences component of the Introductory Professional Term within the Collaborative Schools Initiative, over the course of the action research study, a supportive and reflective research community developed (Palmer, 1998). Our conversations became wide reaching as they grew to encompass not only other aspects of the preservice teacher education program at the University of Alberta, but also changes in our own mentoring practices. As a result of the focus on changes made while planning for purposeful field experiences for both student teachers and their mentors, the cohort participants left the research process (Greenwood & Levin, 1998) with a wealth of ways to encourage meaningful change in existing field experience practices. These suggestions have been described throughout the thesis and will not be reiterated here, but do answer the central research question identified in Chapter One - how the pre-service field experience offered professional growth opportunities for a cohort of cooperating teachers.

It is also important to note that none of these observations could be made public (Lambert, 1995; Noffke, 1995) if not for the establishment of a collective of concerned educators who, by consciously creating and then sustaining the cohort, began to view themselves as both gatekeepers for the profession and caregivers to teacher candidates. By investing much interest in this issue over an extended period of time, they/we have revealed their/our concern for the teaching profession and the people who have chosen to

work within it. Through their/our efforts these cohort members have garnered both the lived experiences and constructed knowledge to say,

"This worked, this did not, and this would be a good thing to repeat at your school".

This concluding chapter provides additional closing comments in three areas: recommendations for stake holder groups involved in CSI, reflections about my evolution as a researcher and recommendations about factors and procedures to consider when establishing an action research cohort.

Recommendations for Stake Holder Groups Involved in CSI

As previously mentioned, the process of going public with discoveries made by the cohort members during the action research process is an important accomplishment in the hearts and minds of those involved. The members of the cohort invite all like-minded readers to take in the suggestions for the preservice teacher field experience program embedded in this document. We would also encourage all those who benefit from these suggestions to continue to go public. With this in mind we further encourage future cohorts to invite other stakeholders to be a continuous part of their discussions – members of the Faculty of Education (U of A), the Alberta Teachers' Association, University Facilitators, host schools, School Coordinators, Cooperating Teachers, Student Teachers and Alberta Learning could surely inform the discussion.

Reflections about My Evolution as a Researcher

As I reflect back on the tremendous joy that I have experienced from this project now at its conclusion, I am also reminded of the hard work that made this research -- and this document -- possible. It is important that the reader not leave this document with the impression that this action research process is as simple as inviting six or seven people together for coffee and a chat. To leave the reader with the impression that this cohort of co-researchers were serendipitously pulled together would be false and misleading. Hard

work is involved in this research process. The coming together of this action research cohort, and the subsequent successes of the cohort, has been a conscious orchestration on the part of the researcher.

While grateful to my hard working cohort members, and the ease with which they allowed themselves to come together, I now pause and ponder, "What have I learned as an action researcher." In addition to the hours spent transcribing audio tape recordings, researching current literature, analyzing, interpreting, synthesizing, drafting, editing and rewriting the final passages of this document, I still find myself hard at work sorting out the roles I played throughout the action research cycles.

In cycle one I was the neophyte researcher, concerned with inviting my peers to join me in purposeful discussions about working with student teachers. When the first members of the pilot presented themselves, I was so enamored with the discussion process I neglected to record the dialogue.

In cycle two, after experiencing the pilot, I became increasingly more comfortable with action research. With increased comfort came the confidence to seek out, and invite in, additional members and guest speakers. All these people added to the richness of the ensuing discussions.

In cycle three I moved with far greater purpose, at times deliberately scripting not only the location of discussions but also the topic. While scripting each topic according to the previous session I also allowed myself to be less involved in the cohort dialogue. By facilitating discussions instead of controlling them, I placed myself in the role of co-learner within the cohort. This role only occurred when I allowed myself to become a conscientious listener -- and in doing so, I heard so much more.

And even in cycles four and five, when the cohort was well established, I know I was still required to be a facilitator, record keeper, manager and a cohort building host. Maintaining this documentation is critically important for the difference between a group

of people gathering together and sharing experiences and an action research study is the systematic collection of data. Without this collection of data the cohort could not go public with its findings. My current awareness as an action researcher has allowed me to plan more deliberately, act more consciously, observe more intentionally and reflect more critically than I did before. It is this heightened awareness I now carry with me as I move back to my teaching roots in the public school environment.

While it is hoped that the narrative accounts in this thesis have demonstrated that the actions undertaken by the cohort had a moral underpinning (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999, p. 106), it is also important to mention that there are multiple critical voices in this area that were not heard. Many overburdened and burnt out classroom teachers express disapproval if asked to assume the additional responsibility of mentoring a pre-service teacher. Administrators and classroom teachers, fearing reduced student performance, also dismiss student teachers, considering them a liability. These dissenting voices did not present themselves within the cohort. Furthermore, even though a large majority of the cohort reported negative recollections of their own student teaching experiences, our group did not address these issues. Instead a positive *zeitgeist* kept this cohort moving forward, looking for proactive and progressive outcomes not only for the student teachers but also for themselves and their fellow staff members. They/we remained positive because they/we became informed.

Through the action research process of this study, I have also come to see that all teachers have a tacit knowledge they draw upon when generating or responding to questions. Through the seeking of questions and their answers I became aware of the creation of professional knowledge. This was a departure in thinking for myself -- as well as other cohort members -- who were schooled in the traditionalist social science model (Zeichner & Liston, 1987) which proposed the application of theory *to* practice as opposed to the convergence of intrinsic (and often subconscious) theories or judgments *of* practice. Teachers, and in the case of this study, cooperating teachers, have traditionally been seen, and/or viewed by themselves, as implementers of policy, policy created by someone else. This external knowledge therefore counts as official knowledge in the heart and minds of

many educators. This research project repeatedly confirmed that many cooperating teachers are still clinging to a technician mode of field experience. This model which features a component of teacher 'readiness' is contingent on the "application and demonstration of previously acquired knowledge and skills" (Zeichner & Liston, 1987, p. 31). Student teachers, on the other hand, are encouraged to think of their teacher education as the start of a reflective journey, during which they will have greater teacher autonomy and increased democratic participation during their field experience (Zeichner & Liston, 1987, p. 23) and within the schools.

Recommendations, Factors and Procedures to Consider when Establishing an Action Research Cohort

In order to assist other action researchers create a collaborative discussion process I offer the following suggestions. Some of the acts that allowed us[1] to sustain commitment to the action research cohort were as follows:

- attend group meetings which may be concerned or connected with the issue being explored. Personal or 'in person' solicitations garnered the most responses.

- invite as many people as possible to the initial research meeting -- be bold in your approach for you can never anticipate who may be interested.

- talk to like-minded people and ask them to talk to people they feel may be interested in the topic being explored. This fanning out of advocates may expedite the trolling process.

- when trolling for participants emphasize that real, practical solutions to perceived concerns will be discussed and attempted. The fact that group members are going to talk about concerns and suggested improvements, which will then be enacted, may be a tremendous draw for many educators.

- find an inviting setting, within a central location, for meetings in order to

[1] While drafting these recommendations I consulted the cohort members for their suggestions.

promote a richer conversation -- a kitchen table like setting with comfortable chairs is preferable.

• ask for input from the initial members when establishing a meeting schedule. Create a contact/phone list early in the process so that members may begin to network with each other.

• ensure that all members of the action research discussion group understand that each session will be recorded. In addition to recording field notes of each session, include a diagram of the seating arrangements of the meeting in your field notes to aid in the deciphering of each member's audio identification and dialogue patterns.

• transcribe each session in the time period before the next session. (I found it necessary to personally transcribe each session in the days following the session. I also consulted my field notes to establish who was speaking).

• establish a positive tone within each meeting by contributing snacks. In addition to the physical 'pick-me-up' that nourishment provided, it may also encourage the verbal contribution of some members. There may be an obligation (in a positive way) to contribute to the dialogue if one is eating the food provided by the host.

• go out for a supper occasionally! Shared meals not only show appreciation for the volunteer time of cohort members/research participants but also build community in an informal environment.

• allow the conversation to unfold without interruption from the host. Encourage intervals of silence -- for this allows richer questions and comment to come forth, which in turn will foster a unique cohort culture. Everyone has to believe in the purposefulness of the group, with the understanding that the professional conversation will lead to better practice.

• consistently encourage input and ideas from all members -- cycle back and ask for opinions and comments from those members who have remained silent for long periods of time. Welcoming questions, asked in a non-threatening manner may be greatly appreciated by hesitant members.

• conclude each session with a commitment to carry out one positive idea or suggestion from the discussion and and commit to discussing it during

the next session. During the subsequent discussions previously discussed ideas can be taken to the next level and expanded.

• expand the discussion topic further by inviting knowledgeable guests and/or all stakeholders to share their stories during the group meetings. If pre-reading material is available, distribute this purposeful reading before so that questions can be formulated in advance.

• validate the work by sharing what has been discovered with like minded people. This process of going public with findings or discoveries acts as a rehearsal for sharing the discoveries of the cohort with our co-workers or the greater public, who may not be as receptive.

The final word on establishing and maintaining a cohort of collaborators is drawn from discussion with my father, who sagely suggested that it is wise to, "frequently thank all persons involved in the discussion process. Thank them for their contributions and thank them for their faithfulness" (Ray E. Leppard, personal communication, March 3rd, 2003).

My deep regards and sincere thanks to all.

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APPENDIX A: **Action Research Permission Form**

I _____ have read the letter by Stephen Leppard, dated _____, requesting my participation in the research examining 'Whole School Experiences' within the Collaborative Schools Initiative. I agree to participate with the understanding that:

a) I may withdraw from the research aspect of the study at any time without penalty, by notifying the researcher.

b) I may request that all or some of the data collected be omitted at my request,

c) my identity will not be revealed,

d) the audiotape recording will not be shared with anyone outside of the action research 'focus group' cohort and/or the researchers supervisory committee without permission being granted from the person(s) the researcher wish to cite,

e) the data being used will be subject to the same procedures and constraints as outlined in the letter and Ethics Review Application.

_____ _____

Signature Date

Ethics Review Oct./99

APPENDIX B: **Actual Name in Print Permission Form**

To: Action Research Cohort Members
From: Stephen Leppard
Re: Ethics Approval to use *Actual Name* in Print

Good Day People:

This generic document has been sent out to educators requesting your input in two ways. While some of you may be familiar with what I'm proposing at this time, others may not be. If this letter is not completely self explanatory, please contact me at 476-8671 ext 321 (wk).

Thank you

I have reached a point in the editing process which requires your assistance. Each of you have been an important part of my professional work to date. Because each of you have made a significant contribution to this body of work, which should be acknowledged, I have (with your previous verbal permission) used your actual names in the document. At this time I need to acquire your written permission to proceed further.

In this package you will find a complete copy of the latest 'draft' of my dissertation. As the chart immediately below this section will verify, your actual name appears on the following pages. Therefore I ask you to read each page carefully. If you agree with the context in which I have used your name, I ask that you sign (or initial) and date each page directly beside your highlighted name.

If you would like to make changes to the text, please feel free to do so at this time. If you would like the passage struck from the text completely, please note this expectation. I also ask that you sign and date the bottom portion of this document and return it, along with your initialized draft copy to me at your earliest convenience.

chapter one

chapter two

chapter three

chapter four

chapter five

chapter six

_____ _____

name of contributor date

APPENDIX C: **Chronology of Action Research Cycles**

1st AR cycle	Month	Date	Year	Location	Event
(Winter 1999)	January	11	1999	Lorelei School	discussion
	February	18	1999	Lorelei School	discussion
	March	18	1999	Prince Charles	discussion
	April	11	1999	Prince Charles	St.T. Forum
2nd AR cycle	**Month**	**Date**	**Year**	**Location**	**Event**
(Fall 1999)	November	4	1999	Ottewell School	overview
	November	*9*	*1999*	*Field Experience Conference*	
	November	18	1999	U of A campus	Dr. Gordon Calvert
	December	1	1999	Ottewell School	Dr. K. Sanford
3rd AR cycle	**Month**	**Date**	**Year**	**Location**	**Event**
(Winter 2000)	January	19	2000	U of A campus	discussion
	February	2	2000	U of A campus	discussion
	February	21	2000	U of A campus	discussion
	March	1	2000	U of A campus	discussion
	April	12*	2000	U of A campus	discussion/supper
4th AR cycle	**Month**	**Date**	**Year**	**Location**	**Event**
(Fall 2000)	September	19	2000	U of A campus	discussion
	October	5	2000	U of A campus	Joe Norris
	November	2	2000	U of A campus	discussion
	November	20	2000	*Field Experience Conference*	
	November	30	2000	U of A campus	Mark Yurick
	December	12*	2000	U of A campus	discussion/supper
5th AR cycle	**Month**	**Date**	**Year**	**Location**	**Event**
(Winter 2001)	January	16	2001	U of A campus	St. T. Forum
	January	30	2001	U of A campus	discussion
	February	13	2001	U of A campus	discussion
	February	22**	2001	University of Calgary	WestCAST
	March	2	2001	*Field Experience Conference*	
	March	13	2001	U of A campus	discussion
	April	11	2001	U of A campus	discussion
	April	25*	2001	U of A campus	D.Sande/supper

** Western Conference Association for Student Teaching (WestCAST) @ Calgary, Alberta

APPENDIX D: **Site-Based Preservice Teacher Educator -- Graduate Level Course** (pp 1 of 4)

The University of Manitoba
Faculty of Education

132.543 L03 The Cooperating Teacher and Student Teaching

July 9–13, 2001 -:- + 3 Sat, Sept. 29, Oct. 27, Dec. 1 from 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

Instructor:	Dr. Renate Schulz
Office:	Room 227 Education Bldg.
Office Hours:	Every afternoon, July 9-13. By appointment any other time.
Telephone:	474-9040, 837-4667 (H)
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Course Description

An examination of mentoring practices and various models of supervision, and an exploration of the components of collaborative mentoring that contribute most effectively to the professional growth of both the teacher and the teacher candidate.

Text

Graham, P., Hudson-Ross, S., Adkins, C., McWhorta, P., & Stewart, J., (Eds.) (1999) Teacher Mentor. A Dialogue for Collaborative Learning. New York, Teachers College Press.

Additional readings will be provided in class.

Course Outline

The following topical outline will serve as a starting point, to be amended as class discussion, questions and interests dictate.

- Personal beliefs about teaching, coaching, mentoring
- Supervision styles
- Alternative practicum models
- Developing and enhancing observation, communication and relational skills
- Evaluating teaching
- Issues in student teaching
- Collaborative mentoring as a personal, professional development opportunity; becoming a reflective practitioner
- Inquiry into one's own practice through a self-directed mentoring practicum

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Assignments

A. Book Review (25%) Due Date: September 29, 2001

Review Teacher Mentor and discuss how the ideas in the book can/cannot be applied to the practicum setting and to the work of the collaborating teacher as mentor. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the book? What contribution did the book make to your understanding of the practicum?

Length: Approximately 10 pages, typed, double-spaced.

B. Review of Three (3) Journal Articles (15%) Due Date: October 27, 2001

Recent journal articles related to the topics on the course outline will be provided in class. The first part of your review should include a summaryof the main ideas in the article. Part two of the review should be your response to the article. The following questions will be helpful in guiding your thinking about responses to the articles: Do you agree/disagree with the author's position? Did you gain new insights? What are the implications for current practice? What connections can you make to other things you have read or learned?

Length: Approximately 2 pages, typed, double-spaced for each review.

C. Mentoring Practicum (60%) Due Date: December 1, 2001

It isn't enough to ask teachers what they do, for what they do and what they say often diverge. One must get at what teachers do through direct, recorded observation that permits a very detailed description of behaviour and a reconstruction of intentions, strategies and assumptions. The confrontation with directly observable data often produces an educational shock, as teachers discover that they act according to theories of action different to the ones they espouse. (Schön)

In this practicum the attention shifts from the activities of the teacher candidate to **your activities as a mentor**. The investigation of your own practice as a mentor will be shaped by your school context, and therefore proposals for this assignment will be negotiated on an individual basis.

Following is a possible format for the account of your mentoring practicum:
A description of the context, a narrative of 3 interactions between the teacher candidate and the collaborating teacher, and a critical review of the practicum experience.

The context component. Include details about the setting, you as the teacher, the teacher candidate, and the advising style you hope to use.

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The narrative component. Include a detailed analysis of three interactions. If the interaction is focused around a lesson, the narrative could include:

- A discussion of the teacher's pre-lesson advisory strategy/planning
- An account of the pre-lesson teacher candidate/collaborating teacher conference
- The collaborating teacher's reflection on this discussion
- A brief account of the teacher candidate's lesson
- An account of the post-lesson discussion between the teacher candidate and the collaborating teacher
- The teacher's reflection on his/her role in the discussion

Videotapes may be submitted in combination with the written accounts. Videotaping is a very effective means of gaining new insights into the way we interact with others, but permission to videotape or audiotape must be granted by the teacher candidate.

The critical review component. This should consist of a critical review of the experience with reference to the context and the narrative analysis of the teacher candidate/collaborating teacher interactions. The questions to be asked here are: **What have you learned about yourself as a teacher/mentor? How has this experience contributed to both your professional growth and the professional growth of your teacher candidate?**
The following questions may be helpful:

In trying to support the professional growth & development of the teacher candidate in my classroom ...

- What did I try?
- What types of questions did I ask my teacher candidate?
- What worked/didn't work?
- What did I learn?
- How did I learn it?
- Why is this important?
- How am I going to use what I learned from this?

Some sentence starters that may be helpful in your reflective writing:

- I am coming to understand...
- I now have a better understanding of...
- I was surprised by...
- I am feeling confident in my ability to... This can be seen in...
- I see a strength in my ability to...
- An area that needs further work (or knowledge or understanding) is... I saw this in... I plan to...

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C. Alternative Assignments

For those who will not be mentoring a teacher candidate in the fall term, alternative arrangements will be discussed in class.

If possible, assignments should be typed. Submit assignments with a cover page that includes the following information: name, student number, title, date and instructor's name. Use a consistent referencing style to acknowledge the ideas of others.

Letter Grade Conversion

A+	95-100	Exceptional	C+	75-79	Satisfactory
A	90-94	Excellent	C	70-74	Adequate
B+	85-89	Very Good	D	60-69	Marginal
B	80-84	Good	F	Below 60	Failure

Faculty of Education Policy on Attendance at Class

Regular attendance is expected of all students in all courses. An instructor can initiate procedures to debar a student from attending classes and from final examinations where unexcused absences exceed three hours of scheduled classes in any one term. s:\schulz\132.543-2001-CO.doc